

# RENASCENCE

A CRITICAL JOURNAL OF LETTERS

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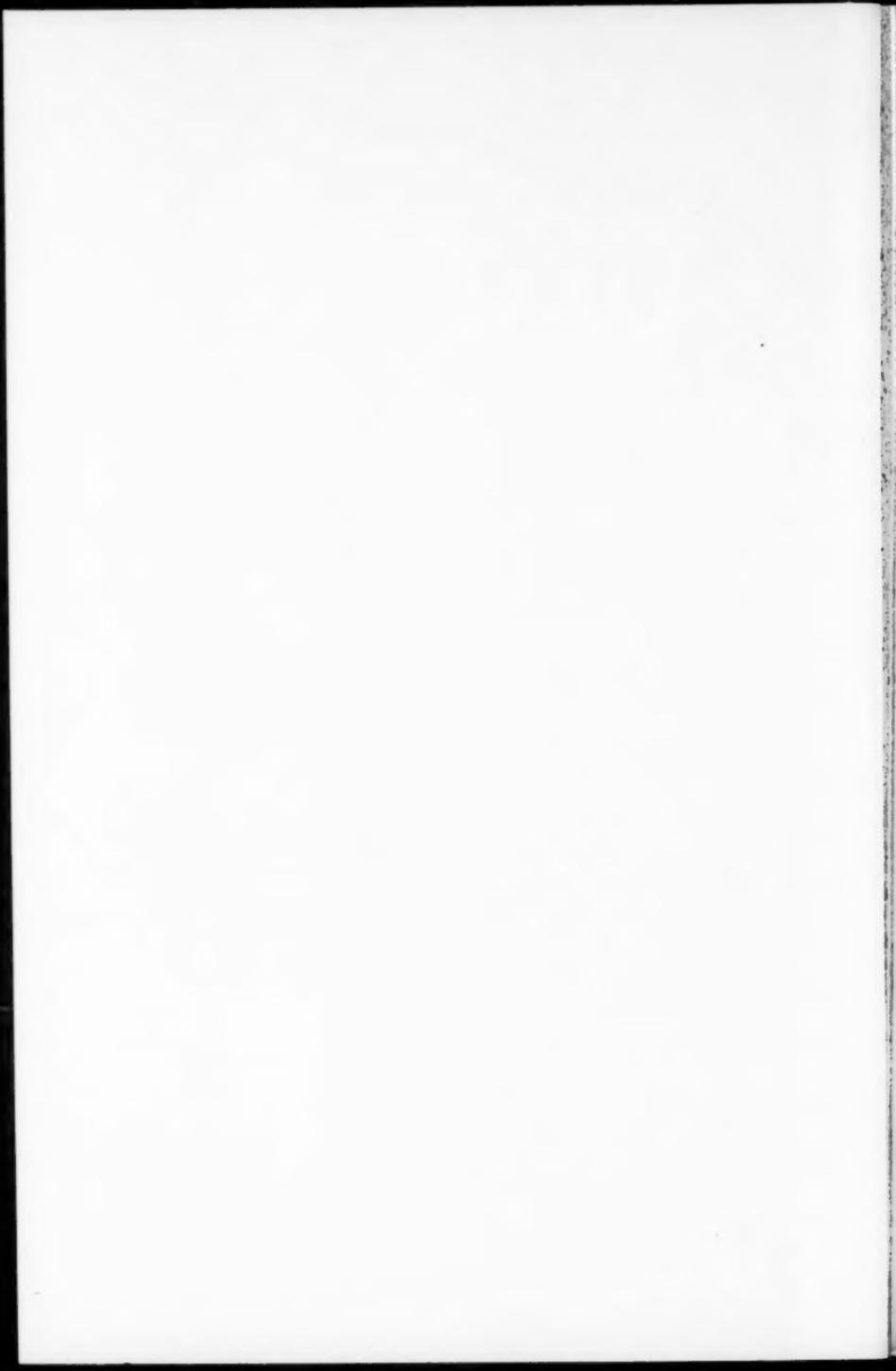
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# T. S. Eliot's Poetry: The Quest and the Way (Part I)

By JOHN B. VICKERY

T. S. ELIOT has suggested that in the writing of poetry "each venture is a new beginning." Despite this emphasis on discontinuity, a coherent pattern encompasses all of Eliot's poetry. His poems and plays fall naturally and easily into three main stages, each of which contributes to the unfolding of the total pattern. These stages are the quest for a hero, the quest of the hero, and the tracing out of the Way. They, in turn, focus upon the satiric and elegiac exposure of human inadequacies and limitations, the knowledge and wisdom of religious consciousness, and the importance for man of such things as the Church, history, and the family.

Central to this pattern is a hero or protagonist who is sought and, in turn, seeks and finds the way to a complete human and religious consciousness. At the first stage the protagonist is thought of as an individual, a person whose heroic nature is a combination of the eighteenth-century gentleman and Pascal's *bonnête homme*. But as the early poems make clear, he is only an ideal, a vague abstraction whose form and nature are incompletely and dimly realized. Consequently, the protagonist proper does not appear as a character in the early poems. Here his definition is almost entirely negative, formulated through ironic and satiric portraits of his antagonists. Since this initial context for the protagonist is society, it follows that his antagonists are represented as the weaklings, fools, and tyrants of contemporary society. In effect, Eliot is indicting and lamenting his age's inability to produce a culture-hero capable of reforming and reviving its moribund society. Through the remainder of his work both the poet and his readers come to realize the difficulty of this task and the necessity of beginning with the fundamental character of mankind, which is not so much social as religious, though, to be sure, these two elements are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily contradictory.

Traditionally the hero-savior of a culture or society is regarded as a representative of his people, as, in some sense, a microcosmic equivalent of the nation or tribe. That is to say, he is more than an individual; he is the spirit of a community or even of mankind. By the same token the salvation sought by the protagonist for his community is not only physical but also spiritual and psychological. It is these attributes and pursuits which characterize Eliot's protagonist in his second phase, that represented in *The Waste Land*. Here the protagonist is set not only in the context of society but also of comparative religion, myth, and legend. The latter adumbrates—as the general does the



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specific—the material of individual psychology which provides the context for the third stage, that of *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, and *The Confidential Clerk*. Even in the second stage, however, the protagonist is neither exclusively nor even predominantly active in character, for his first task is to understand the nature of his quest. Thus, in *The Waste Land* he observes a number of scenes in which an earlier hero, the Grail knight, participates. Through these, with their details of primitive ritual, past history, and contemporary incident, he recognizes the universal character of the protagonist's role. He also recognizes that it is a role, a function not a person. It belongs to all men; hence he is inevitably a protagonist and committed to an active role. At this point he enters the third stage, that of the Way with its own threefold discipline and progress. Thus, from the Ariel poems to *The Confidential Clerk*, he, both as mankind and as individual man, is brought by slow degrees to an awareness that each man is his own protagonist and that the reformation or revivification of society is dependent on the possession and utilization of the religious consciousness and its particular mode of wisdom.

Turning to the poems themselves, we find that the thematic focus of the poems published between 1915 and 1920, that is, of such poems as *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *La Figlia Che Piange*, *Mr. Apollinax*, and *Sweeney Among the Nightingales*, is the quest for a hero capable of assuming the burdens and resisting the pressures imposed by the modern world. The two dominant accents of this quest are the elegiac and the satiric. Those poems of a satiric character provide a series of exposures of illusory or mock-heroes. Thus, we have the hero as sensitive intellectual and devotee of culture whether known as Prufrock or Burbank or nameless as in *Portrait of a Lady* and *A Cooking Egg*; the hero as the man of superior intelligence, as the son of Apollo, whom we meet in *Mr. Apollinax*; the hero as the resourceful man of action, the Ulyssean Sweeney; the hero as the exhausted and apprehensive old man of *Gerontion*; the hero as the man of affairs who appears severally as Bleistein, Sir Ferdinand Klein, and *Le Directeur*; and finally, the hero as the sacred animal, the theriomorphic deity that gives rise to an institution and a cult, such as confronts us in *The Hippopotamus*. In view of this variety there is little to surprise us when the mock-hero of this period emerges ultimately as a *Mélange Adultère de Tont*.

On the other hand, those poems that utilize the elegiac mood constitute by indirection compassionate laments for a mankind incapable of producing a hero-king who can fulfill the quest and rescue man from his mortality. Mankind engaged in the commonplaces of existence conjures up "the notion of some infinitely gentle/Infinitely suffering thing." The same note of pathos is struck in *Morning at the Window* except that here mankind itself appears dimly and wistfully aware of its inadequacy. Thus "the damp souls of housemaids"

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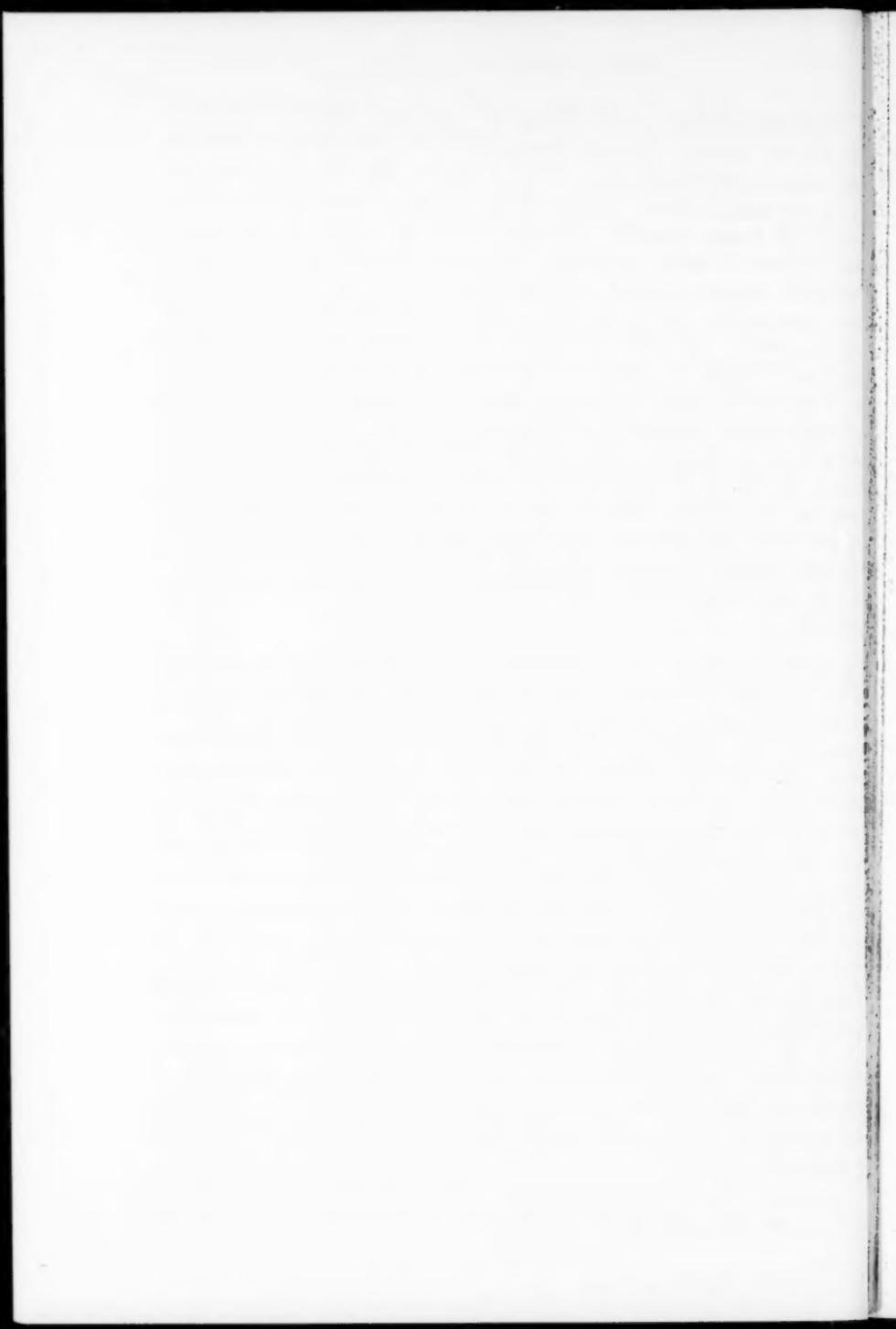
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## ELIOT: QUEST AND WAY

are "sprouting despondently at area gates," faces are "twisted," and smiles hover and are "aimless." *Sweeney Among the Nightingales*, though possessed of comic features and implications, is also a lament both for unfulfilled love and for the death of the tragic hero who is set against the poignant and sorry backdrop of history. Similarly, although *Portrait of a Lady* is essentially a satiric exposure of social desiccation, the speaker concludes with a reverie on death which suggests a measure of sympathy for the woman's position. His query "And should I have the right to smile?" indicates that he senses her pathetic as well as her ludicrous qualities. In *La Figlia Che Piange* a lover's quarrel and farewell are presented in an elegy celebrating the necessary isolation of the heroine whom the hero has failed. It is a lament for unrequited love that modulates into a lament for the absence of the heroic protagonist. In his place is Burbank, the contemporary Antony whom "the god Hercules/Had left." Deserted by his divine counterpart, the hero is condemned to ineffectuality. When his and mankind's shortcomings are viewed satirically, the fools, imposers, charlatans, and schemers are exposed and their power destroyed. When these same weaknesses are seen elegiacally, it is the departed god and those unfortunate individuals who have failed the dangerous office of the hero that are mourned.

WITH *The Waste Land* a transition occurs from the quest for a hero to the quest of the hero. In this *Gerontion* plays a mediating role, detaching the poet from his excoriation of mock-heroes and introducing him to a protagonist who will embark upon and complete the life-saving quest. Gerontion himself is the wise old man, the tribal elder and priest who possesses both good and evil, heroic and cowardly aspects. He is not the protagonist but the maimed king living in a personal waste land, and in consequence, all he can do is recount the legend of his old age. A more likely candidate for the protagonist's role is presented in *The Waste Land* which, on one level, constitutes a series of trials calculated to determine whether or not the protagonist is a true hero. As a result of these trials the protagonist successfully establishes his right to the role. He hears and understands the three divine injunctions: "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata." This, however, does not mean that the struggle against death and toward rebirth is completed. Indeed, only the initial stage, that of the right to struggle, is presented in *The Waste Land*. It constitutes simultaneously man's introduction to and reclamation of the knowledge of religious consciousness. The successive modes by means of which the human race became aware of a power greater than itself are presented obliquely and in compressed form.

In essence *The Waste Land* presents a threefold quest of which the first is that of the Grail quest itself. This aspect of the quest pattern is fundamental-



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ly a ritual of action; it exhibits a pattern of public behavior. Here Eliot's protagonist is the Grail-knight whose adventures and temptations in the Waste Land test his right to knowledge of the Grail, but a Grail knight whose experiences are presented in a manner reminiscent of the dissolving perspectives and fragmented order of the *Satyricon*. The second quest is primarily a ritual of knowledge which not only recapitulates but re-enacts the evolution of religious consciousness. Just as the Grail romances constitute the source of the first quest pattern, so Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* provides the basic form for the second quest. Miss Weston declared that she was concerned with "comparative religion in its widest sense" and the same attitude controlled Eliot's selection of materials in *The Waste Land*. In both cases nature myths, fertility rituals, mystery cults, and the Grail legends are seen as progressive stages in the gradual evolution of man's religious consciousness. These observances and their records reveal increasing degrees of the abstraction in their conception of what constitutes, in Miss Weston's phrase, "the secret sources of life." At the same time their respective rituals progress from forms of imitation to forms of knowledge. The act of cohabitation, for example, is transformed into the subtler and more sophisticated concepts of communion or incarnation. This development is charted in *The Waste Land* by such figures as the Hyacinth girl (the sacred harlot), Stetson (the warrior-priest of Mars and an initiate of the Mystery cult), Mr. Eugenides (the proselytizing worshipper of the mystery cult), and Phlebas (the novice who is initiated into the meaning of divine life through the ritual of death); by such scenes as the Waste Land, the vision of Tiresias, and the Chapel Perilous; and by their relation to the central character, the protagonist, who in this second quest symbolizes mankind as it evolves historically toward increased religious consciousness.

The first quester moves from place to place in the timeless present of literature, while the second, following the pattern of history, journeys from the past to the present. In the third quest the direction of history is reversed; the starting point is the present and the protagonist, who is modern man, works back into the past. Here the theme is not the evolution so much as the clarification of religious consciousness. The psychology of rediscovery replaces the history of discovery; the progressive unfolding of man's spiritual nature constitutes a ritual of wisdom. Beginning in that darkness which is characteristic of all human societies, the protagonist ultimately recovers the original mythic distinction between the sacred and the profane and so sees what is truly illuminating, namely, the vision of death and resurrection, the supreme ritual in the life of mankind. On this third level the literary source comparable to the Grail romances and *From Ritual to Romance* is Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. Frazer's study of the beliefs and institutions of primitive man, plunging, as he remarks, into "those dark ages which lie beyond the range of history"

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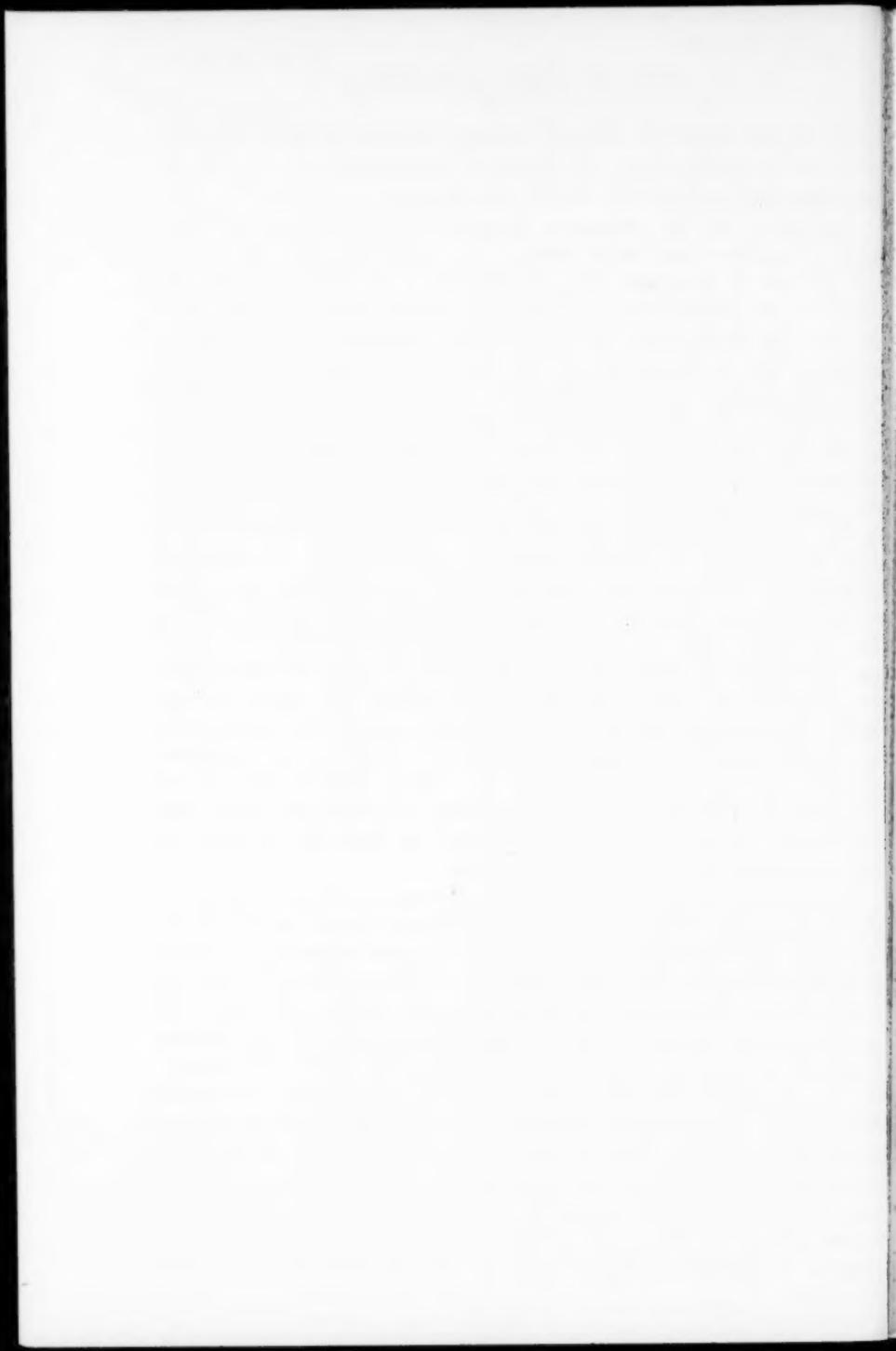
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## ELIOT: QUEST AND WAY

in quest of the origins and nature of mankind, provides an exact image and analogue to the protagonist who as modern man searches the past of his race for knowledge relevant to his own conduct and attitudes.

Needless to say the protagonist occupies these three roles—of Grail knight, of primitive man, and of modern man—simultaneously. And it is in terms of each of these that particular passages in the poem must be considered. A convenient example of what this entails is the hyacinth garden scene in "The Burial of the Dead." The scene emphasizes not so much the betrayal of man or woman but of love itself. In his essay on Dante, Eliot throws considerable, though indirect, light upon this theme by his insistence that the love of man and woman depends upon the higher love, "the attraction towards God." It is precisely this form of love which is not realized by the protagonist in the hyacinth garden. He does not see that the hyacinths in the girl's arms represent the love of a god for man. Because he cannot explain his attraction to the Hyacinth girl, he finds that his powers of articulation and vision are paralyzed: "I could not speak, and my eyes failed." As a result of his failure to connect this love with the higher love, he cannot even detect the sacred marriage which the girl, who is a priestess of the god, is offering him. Her offer is one of knowledge and initiation on the lowest level of the quest: the mystery of human and vegetative fertility is within the protagonist's grasp. Lacking the higher love, modern man sees in the sacred marriage "simply the coupling of animals." He is astounded that a woman should forthrightly offer herself to a stranger, for, in Frazer's words, he misconceives her motive "as an orgy of lust" rather than "as a solemn religious duty." By the same token his admission, "I was neither/Living nor dead, and I knew nothing," stamps him as a man of the present, one of those who by doing and knowing nothing fail to attain actual existence.

Concomitantly, as the Grail quester, the protagonist reacts in the garden with a combination of Gawain's awe and astonishment in the presence of the "rich" and mysterious Grail and of Perceval's surprise at finding his hostess by his bed during the night. His confession, "I knew nothing," is also appropriate to the Grail knight who, as Miss Weston remarks, often began life "in ignorance, not only of all knightly accomplishments, but in some instances of the very existence of human beings other than his mother and himself." Similarly, as ancient man whose religious consciousness focusses on imitative fertility rituals, the protagonist recognizes the sacred character of the girl and regards her vocation, in Miss Weston's words, "as an exercise of more than common virtue" that is to be "rewarded with a tribute of mixed wonder, reverence, and pity." It is this recognition which underlies the evocation of that poignant beauty and awe in the passage. At the same time the protagonist's admission of ignorance corresponds both to primitive man's uncertainty about



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his relation to animate and inanimate form and to the minimal character of his religious consciousness.

THE first quest cycle, ending with *The Waste Land*, achieves the knowledge of religious consciousness, that is, a recognition of human mortality and divine immortality and of their interrelation. The protagonist of *The Waste Land* stands midway between the individual person and a symbolic representative of all mankind. His quest is both that of a single soul coping with a crisis and that of the world endeavoring to perpetuate itself through its divine king's ritual of death and rebirth. The old Fisher King is able ultimately to face calmly his death and the destruction of his realm. The poem ends on this note of resignation and anticipation with the death of the sacred king still in the offing. Beginning with *The Hollow Men* and continuing through the four Ariel poems, *Journey of the Magi*, *A Song for Simeon*, *Animula*, *Marina*, a new stage of the hero's quest is inaugurated. It presents the wisdom inherent in religious consciousness. This wisdom consists of the recognition that man's religious impulse, his conviction of a power greater than himself, is both essential to and ineradicable from him.

Significantly enough, this transition from the cycle of knowledge to the cycle of wisdom is reflected in Eliot's plays. Indeed, there is a limited but clear sense in which the dramas from *Sweeney Agonistes* to *The Family Reunion* recapitulate the thematic and archetypal development of the poetry from *The Waste Land* to the *Four Quartets*. Thus *The Waste Land*'s mood of resignation and anticipation appears also in *Sweeney Agonistes*. Though Eliot's "Aristophanic melodrama," consisting of only two scenes, is obviously an incomplete play, nevertheless, it reflects the desolation of *The Waste Land*, the terror of *The Hollow Men*, and the protagonist's sense of awareness in both poems. All mankind waits at the close of the play for the antagonist of the hanged god to claim his unidentified victim who is in reality every man:

And you wait for a knock and the turning of a lock  
for you know the hangman's waiting for you.  
And perhaps you're alive  
And perhaps you're dead.

Sweeney's association with the more complex figure of the protagonist of *The Waste Land* is further intensified by his recognition that "Death is life and life is death." The degeneration of life into death and its ultimate redemption through death is the core of understanding which both Sweeney and the protagonist gain from exploring their worlds.

It is with *The Hollow Men* that the full implications of death are borne in upon the protagonist:

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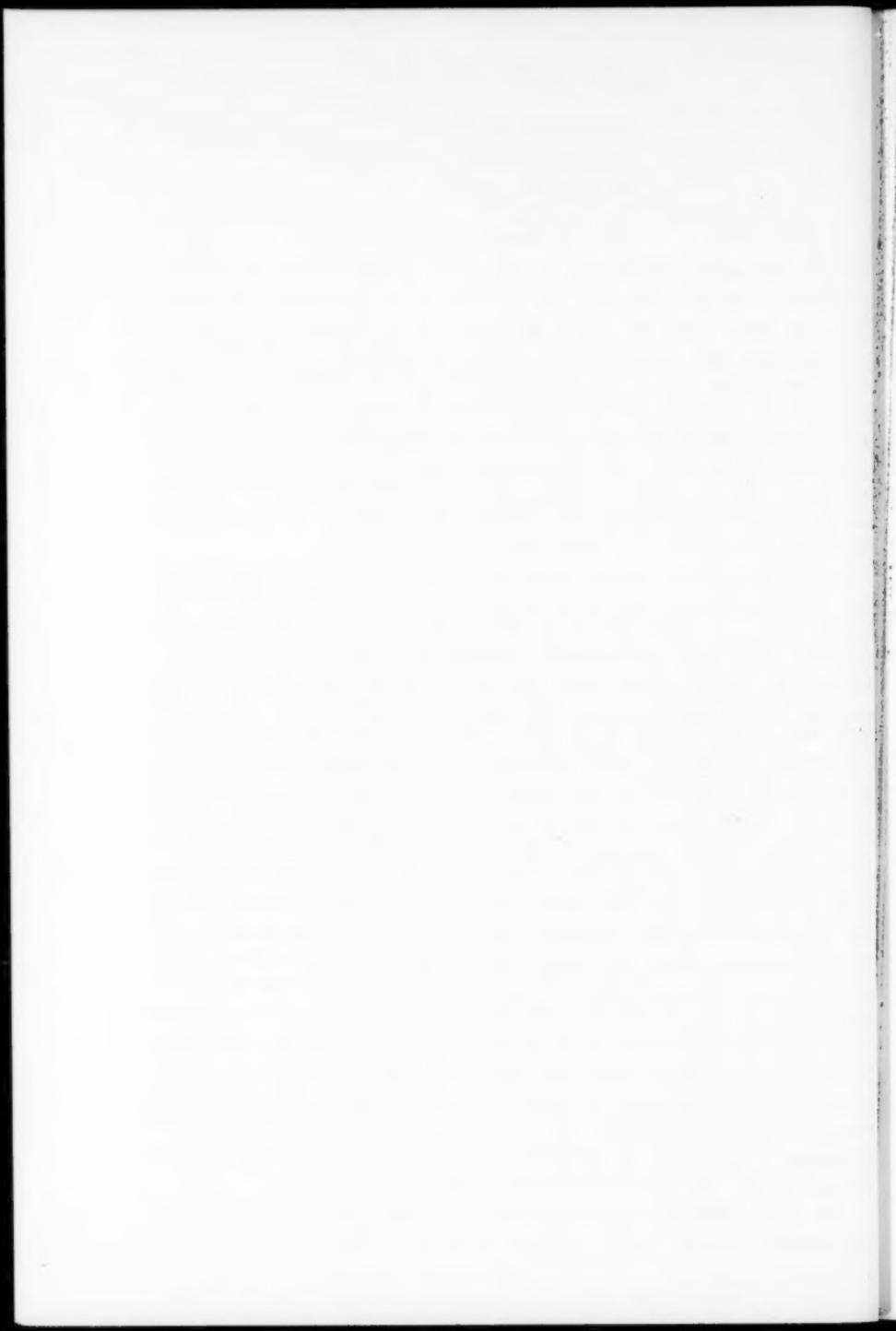
## ELIOT: QUEST AND WAY

Between the conception  
And the creation  
Between the emotion  
And the response  
Falls the Shadow.

Here the protagonist's knowledge is augmented by the wisdom of religious consciousness. Central to this stage are the death of the protagonist, the deposition of the sacred king, and the enduring of rites of transition. His passive role of spectator and observer and his intellectual awareness of the death and resurrection pattern inherent in life are beginning to be transformed into the active role of the participant who apprehends as well as comprehends the pattern. Accordingly, he realizes that between the recognition and the enactment of the myth of the dying and reviving god, there lies the shadow which is both death and the effort of regeneration. It is into this shadow that the hero proceeds while repeating "For Thine is the Kingdom" as a prayer, an affirmation of faith, and a magical charm or talisman.

In order to gain the creative reality of true existence, the protagonist must pass through to the other side of the shadow. As a man, he must lose his life, while as a king, he must abdicate his throne and depart from his realm. His acquiescence to this last is indicated by his admission, "Thine is the Kingdom." With the withdrawal of the king, who is the human representative of the topocosm (T. H. Gaster's term), life subsides on both human and natural levels: "This is the way the world ends." That this is more than an individual death is suggested by the poem's predominant use of plural forms: e.g., "We are the hollow men/We are the stuffed men." Following the extinction of life in *The Hollow Men*, the Ariel poems trace out the attempt of one man to endure those rites of transition by which he apprehends the wisdom of religious consciousness and achieves a new mode of being. Thus, the *Journey of the Magi* begins with the plural mode in which the individual seeking rebirth is not distinguished from his companions. It modulates, however, into the singular form at the close where the protagonist begins to emerge from his background. The clarification of his character and mental development is continued in *A Song for Simeon*, *Animula*, and *Marina*. There is a progressive focussing down of attention on the individual human soul as the place where and the means by which rebirth can actually be achieved. When the speaker in *Marina* finds himself able to request, "let me/Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken," man's awareness and conviction of the wisdom of religious consciousness are complete. Thus he is ready for the next round of trials and the next stage of the eternal quest.

*The Rock* similarly presents, though in a minor key, the recognition of the profound wisdom for the ordering of one's life that is contained in the



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religious consciousness. In both it and the Ariel poems it is the humble persons — Simeon and the builders, both workers for the Church — who grasp this wisdom. Since *The Rock* follows *Ash-Wednesday* and Eliot's entrance into the Anglican communion, it naturally appears to deal more with religion than with religious consciousness. Yet actually it is concerned to present man's awareness of and response to the fact of the divinity operating within him rather than to embody his initiation into a sacred institution.

In effect the play reveals the interrelation of Christianity and earlier forms of religion as a developing phenomenon of history. Beginning with the creation of the world and man, the Chorus sketches human history in terms of the evolution of religious consciousness while regarding the whole as a *praeparatio Christi*:

And when there were men, in their various ways, they struggled in torment towards GOD

Blindly and vainly, for man is a vain thing, and man without GOD is a seed upon the wind: driven this way and that, and finding no place of lodgement and germination.

They followed the light and the shadow, and the light led them forward to light and the shadow led them to darkness,

Worshipping snakes or trees, worshipping devils rather than nothing: crying for life beyond life, for ecstasy not of the flesh.

\* \* \*

And men who turned towards the light and were known of the light  
Invented the Higher Religions; and the Higher Religions were good  
And led men from light to light, to knowledge of Good and Evil.

\* \* \*

Then came at a predetermined moment, a moment in time and of time,  
A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history; tran-  
secting, bisecting the world of time, a moment in time but not like  
a moment of time,

A moment in time but time was made through that moment: for with-  
out the meaning there is no time, and that moment of time gave the  
meaning.

In essence it is this struggle of man's toward God that *The Rock* endeavors to present in terms of drama and pageantry. Yet simply appearing later in history does not in itself put man closer to God, for as *The Rock*'s opening chorus observes: "The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries/Bring us farther from GOD and nearer to the Dust." Only because the protagonist, who is all

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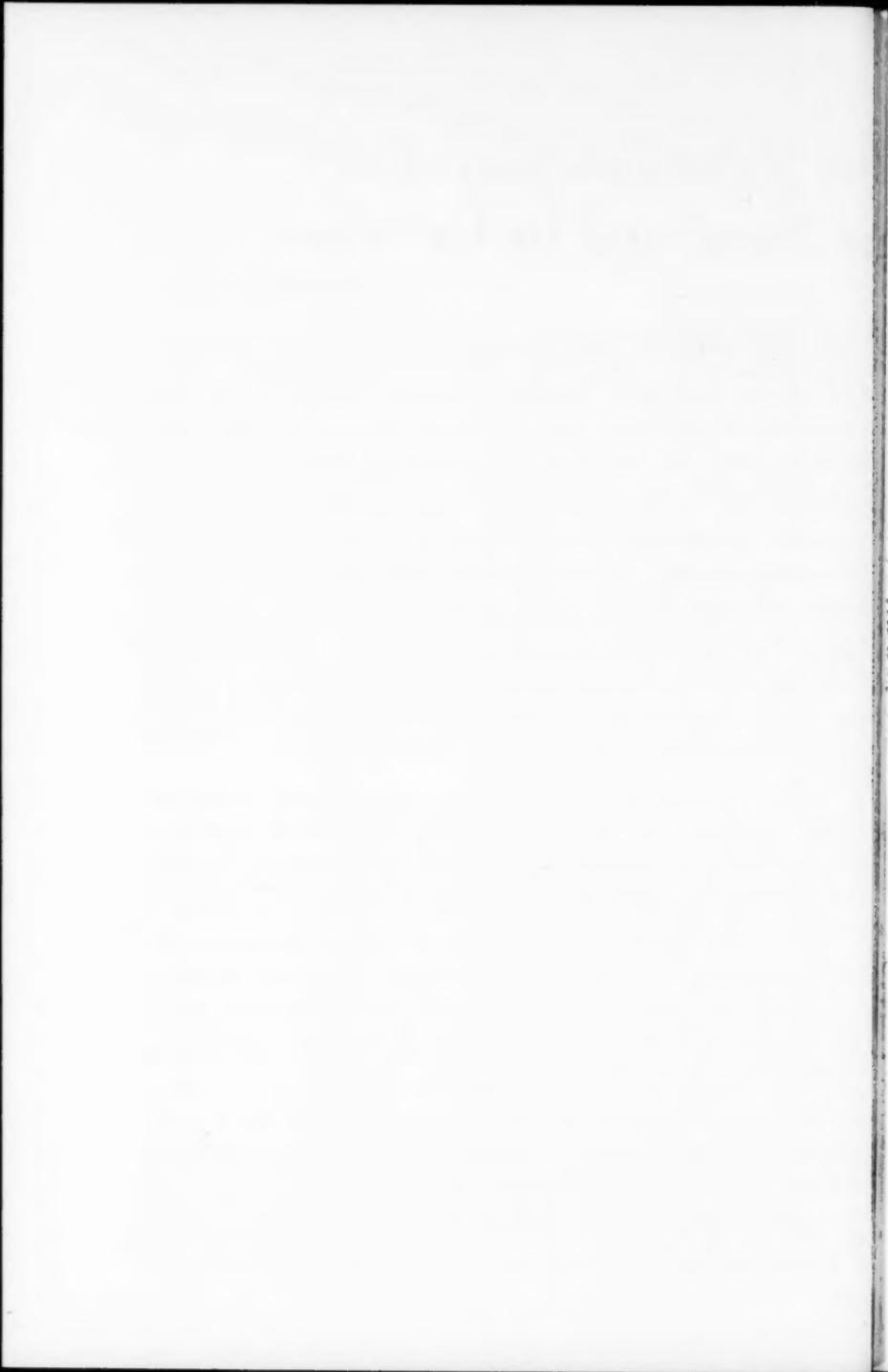
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# The Value-function of the Novel and Its Criticism

BY J. ROBERT BARTH, S.J.

CONCEPTUALISM is as dangerous in literary criticism as it is in philosophy. Had St. Thomas accepted only the universal concepts of Aristotle, without the universal and absolute natures of Plato's theory of forms, he would not have discovered the ultimate basis of metaphysical valuation, the eternal Ideas of the Divine Mind. The same is true, in an analogous sense, of literary criticism. A criticism which studies form, structure, and technique to the virtual exclusion of the value theory which a literary work expresses, is necessarily inadequate. If it were possible for a work of literature to offer no value judgments upon the actions it presents, but only naked experience without the light of an evaluating intelligence, the work would be crippled or meaningless from the start. And, just as the complete and essential literary work of art must include not only the vivid portrayal of experience but also a reasoned *attitude* toward it, so the complete and essential literary criticism must evaluate not only the author's portrayal of his experience but also his metempirical *attitude* toward that experience. Such a criticism is nothing but a testing of the depth and validity of a philosophy.

Such "value criticism" has not, it seems, been a distinguishing characteristic of modern American critics and reviewers. *The Times Literary Supplement* (London) of March 26, 1954 carried an article in which American and British criticism is unfavorably compared with the philosophical and moral seriousness of the French. The key word in contemporary French criticism, we are told, is *la conscience*, a word which to the non-French reader is almost incomprehensible. It is usually, however, so charged with moral intensity, that its two denotations of "conscience" and "consciousness" become fused into a notion much akin to the Christian idea of the soul. The author is careful to point out "the tendency of irreligious and even of Marxist writers to keep *la conscience* holy: *directeur de conscience, vocation de conscience*, words like captured flags." *La critique engagée* is able to keep alive *la littérature engagée*, and one of the most vital mechanisms in this engagement is *la conscience*. "Not here," it is remarked in contrast with English criticism, "the sombre semantic quest, or the bowing down before a verbal image, but a fast dazzling game with barracking and broken bones." The idea of *engagement*, "of a literary work as a battleground and the critic as a partisan," begets a criticism that is, in the fullest sense, alive and significant.



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The American critic, however, has no such lofty conception of his own philosophical responsibility. He is content to accept the hypothesis proposed by the author and to judge his work on that basis, without investigating the significance and philosophical validity of its fundamental presuppositions. A typical case in point is Russell Blankenship's popular survey, *American Literature as an Expression of the National Mind*. In enunciating his basic approach to American literature, Blankenship affirms:

No longer should we dispute over the esthetic worth of our letters, nor should we be deeply disquieted lest some of our writers perchance do not bethink themselves to place in their writings those qualities that are the traditional literary insurance against transiency.

J. Donald Adams, too, unfortunately was speaking for many another American critic when he insisted that "art has not a great deal to do with intellect." Adams, it seems, like so many modern critics, has failed sufficiently to distinguish between art and entertainment.

When Albert Camus' magnificent novel *La Peste* first appeared in 1947, French critics had no qualms of conscience about questioning the validity of Camus' ethical theory. When, however, the English translation was published a year later, American critics simply overlooked its obvious metaphysical and moral inadequacies. They were quite right in calling it "an affirmation . . . of the dignity and the worth of man," but they were less correct in failing to study the values which Camus offers as the foundation for man's dignity. Here is the vast and essential difference between philosophical and non-philosophical criticism.

What is meant, then, by the "value-function" of the novel is not the living experience presented, but the value judgment which the author passes upon it. And what is signified by the "value-function" of the criticism of a novel is this: the critical evaluation of the ethic upon which the author's judgment is based.

To make such a critique a substitute for all the other functions of criticism—structural, verbal, aesthetic, historical—is by no means our intent. We only ask that it be given its rightful place within the framework of the complete and essential criticism. Far from denying that stylistic and structural criticism is a necessary part of the complete appraisal of a literary work, we must insist that the formal complexities are themselves fraught with value-significance. Since fiction is a literary art, it necessarily begins with the word, with metaphorical structure, with "rhetoric as skeleton and style as body of meaning." It is language, particularly metaphorical language, which defines, enunciates, and evaluates a theme, thereby manifesting the limits and the peculiar poise and attitude (within those limits) of any given imagination. There is no Cartesian dichotomy between form and content; we might almost say that style is conception. Both are expressive of value judgments, whether explicit or implicit, and both are eminently worthy of the critic's consideration.

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OUR contention here, in attempting to establish the validity and importance of such an evaluative criticism, is that literature is something more than a slavish copying of the living experiences of men. Literature, whether it be epic or tragedy or novel, refracts an incident in the life of man, through the medium of a sensitive soul. As a result, the human incident is seen in its metaphysical structure, the ends for which it took place are explicated, the intrinsic principles and order of causality which produced it are revealed. Literature, and the novel in particular, presents concrete human experiences in relation to the end of man.

This assertion of the nature and function of literature rests upon a Scholastic analysis of being. In being is to be found the basis of all value and of all valuation. For good, the object of valuation, is being itself considered as the term of an appetitive faculty. Being and the good are convertible terms.

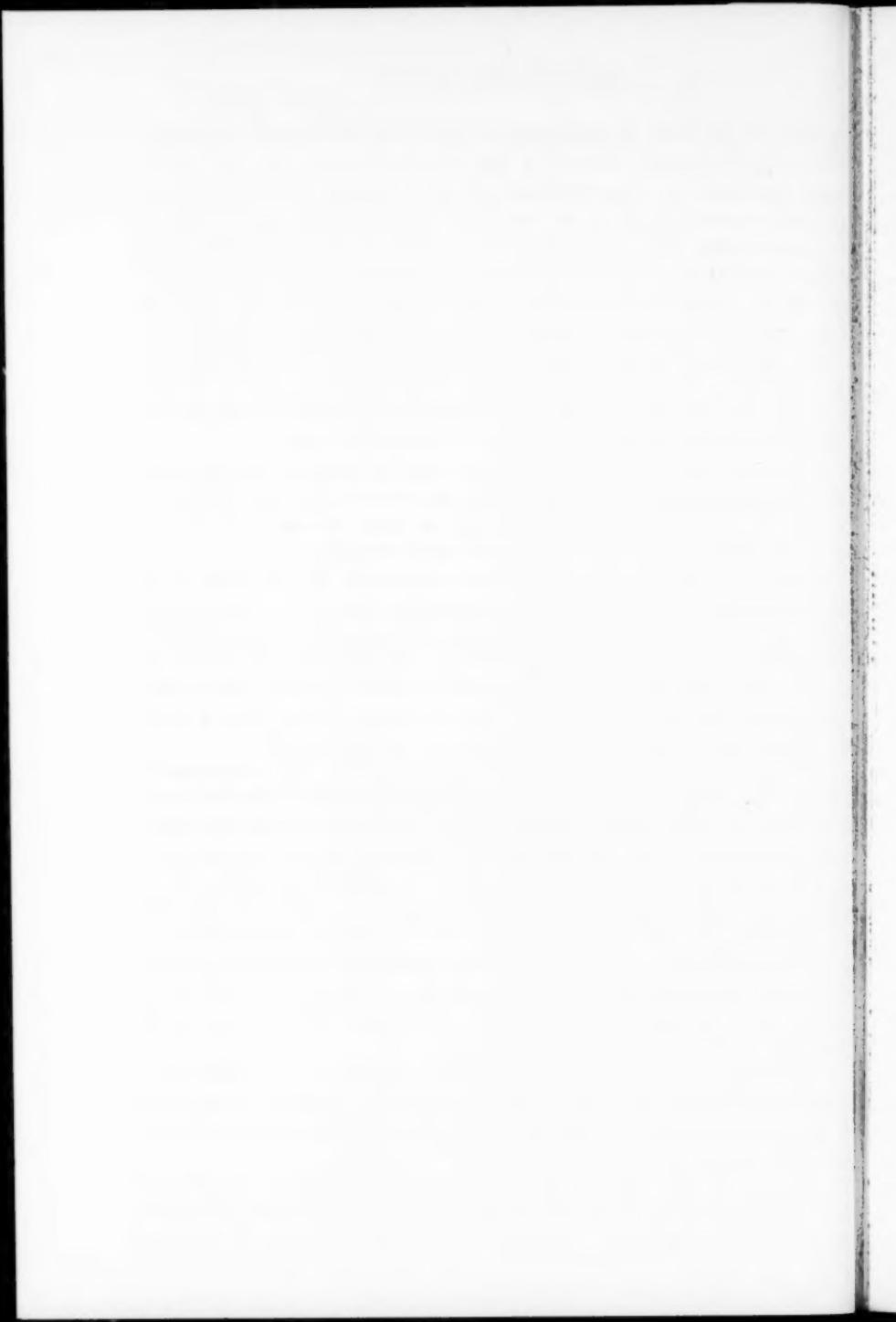
Holding the place of dignity in the finite world of being is man, who alone among terrestrial beings is *conscious* of his own existence and the existence of the hierarchy of being to which he belongs. He alone, because of his rational nature, can affirm and embrace the objective order of things.

Contact with the being of man reveals immediately that his being is not static but dynamic. Not only is he in possession of his own ego, but he is oriented toward reality other than himself, he is capable of an ever-increasing enrichment of his personality through knowledge and love. The being of man reaches out beyond itself; it breaks, in a sense, the bonds of its own particular finite reality. It transcends itself even to the point of aspiring after the infinite, since it is capable of bringing in and uniting to itself all rest, all the non-self.

Now the function of literature is to re-present reality. This representation, however, is a complex one, including both an objective and a subjective aspect. A work of art, besides being a manifestation of some aspect of objective reality, is also a revelation of the being of the author himself. The full appreciation of the work of art is inseparable from contact with the being of the author; for full appreciation imples a sharing in his intuitive experience. And since the artist is not only in possession of his own being, but also enjoys a relation to the objective context in which he exists, the reader's penetration of the artist's personality is also penetration of the world in which he lives, as that world reveals itself to him. The reader shares not only in the being of the artist, but he also shares in the artist's attitude toward other beings.

The being of man responds dynamically to the real. It is a perfective response, because by it man shares more and more in the perfection of the whole. It is a moral response, as well, because it is an ordered response of man's specifically human powers.

It should be made clear at this point that the word "moral" is being used in the sense of "related to the end of man," and therefore has truly philosophical implications. This point is of cardinal importance. The end of man is not



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being considered here primarily from a theological but from an ontological point of view.

The ontological fulfillment which defines the end of man takes place by an intentional assimilation; it is a self-development, a manifestation of vitality. And how is this inner enrichment to be explained? Ultimately, it is founded on participation in being. For man's fulfillment is the satisfaction of the cognitive and tendential faculties by which he is aware of his relation to the whole order of being.

It is clear that man possesses an orientation toward the whole order of being, and that being, considered as the term of an appetitive faculty, is the good. Now the proper end of the human will is the possession of the perfect good; man is perfected by that good which completely fulfills and satisfies all his desires. The supreme and infinitely perfect good is God Himself, and nothing less than God can give man perfect happiness.

But our knowledge of the good in this life is not such as to represent for us the whole of what goodness is. In other words, our present analogous knowledge of God can represent His infinite goodness only in concepts which refer properly to particular goods. Our will-experiences (the experiences of life and of literature) begin, not with knowledge of the perfect good, but with particular goods seen as ends in themselves. Now if these finite goods are conceived not only as ends in themselves but also as capable of satisfying all the desires of man, then man has set up as the goal (at least temporary) of his life something which can give him only partial fulfillment of his desires and which must inevitably result in frustration. Considered in the concrete, then, beatitude, the soul-satiating good, is God Himself. But man, because of his God-given faculty of free will, can incarnate this infinite beatitude in any created thing, and conceive of that creature as fully satisfying. Precisely from this ability to substitute another end for that to which he is naturally ordered, arise all the complexities of the moral life of man.

The search for perfect happiness, now mistakenly sought in some created thing, now truly found in God, is the general theme of all true literature. This is probably what Chesterton had in mind when he remarked that "books without morality in them are books that send one to sleep standing up." Prometheus and Orestes, Virgil and Ovid, Augustine and Dante, Coleridge and Shelley, are all searchers after happiness. For man's literature is concerned with his search for that beatitude which Christian ethics and philosophy show us to be the end of man.

THE novelist, too, is in quest of happiness. He is searching, as Belloc says, for that ultimate "unknown country" toward which we are all travelling. Thomas Wolfe was searching for "the happy land, the end to hunger." Thomas Sutpen, in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, conceived as his beatitude the wrest-

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ing of a plantation from the wilderness. Alan Paton's Pieter, in *Too Late the Phalarope*, sought his happiness, though in vain, in the sympathy and understanding which neither his father nor his wife could give him. Turgenev's celebrated Insarov, in *On the Eve*, looked for his essential happiness in dedication to the freedom of his native land. Adam Trask, in Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, discovered happiness in the realization that, despite the curse of Cain, man is a free and responsible agent. Even *Tom Sawyer* was a boy's search in his adolescent way for what he conceived to be necessary for happiness.

The proper object of the novel, then, and of its heroes, is man in his search for happiness, and this search is founded upon the capacity of the human intellect and will for an infinite or completely satisfying object.

Now there are "realistic" novels of our day which are said to produce vivid and faithful representations of life, without passing moral judgment upon them. Witness Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*, John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra*, Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. What they are concerned to represent, it is maintained, is the things men do, and not the relationship these things have to the principles and purposes of man's existence. But is such a realism possible? Does not every story contain implicitly in its telling an attitude toward man, a philosophy? This philosophy may be vague, or confused, or even (on the explicit level) a denial of its own existence; but it is always there, at least implicitly, and may be discovered by the careful reader.

What is to be criticized in such writers as Hemingway, O'Hara, and Mailer is not their realism, as long as this is kept within the bounds of literary morality. We should be as grateful for it, in fact, when it is artistically good, as we are for the great Christian realism of Sigrid Undset. For they have given us a picture of life which is verifiable in actual reality; they have shown us men struggling, sometimes desperately, for happiness. What is open to criticism in their work is rather the falsity of their philosophical foundations. Since literature is a *res humana*, the pleasure of literature is essentially a rational pleasure. And if a novel proposes for our appreciation something which is essentially unsatisfying to the human intellect, then, while accepting what is good in it, we have a grave responsibility to ourselves to criticize it for its deficiencies. Charity must not be confounded with intellectual indifferentism.

FREDERICK WILHELMSEN, in a sage and incisive article in *America*, August 30, 1952, appealed to modern critics to break down the unfortunate formal distinction between art and morality, and to face squarely "the *human* vision made concrete in art." By this means, he feels, critics would have an instrument which could cope "not alone with the formal structure of art, but also with the sweeping vision of humanity, responsible man, that is incarnated in the artistic heritage of the West." The moral and religious values enter art "precisely at that point at which art ceases to be a mere making and becomes an



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analogical imitation of human action." Art is then seen to be an expression of the drive of man's being toward its fullness and perfection. It is only because the "beauty" of art has been conceived statically, that it has been divorced from other human values. But in turning to the inner dynamism of being, we find for literature an aesthetic which can grow and develop with man himself. Then we find that the novel is concerned with the finite and contingent being which is Man in search of the infinite and absolute Being, which is God.

The organizing principle of the human dynamism toward the fullness of being, as expressed in the art form, is the author's vision of reality. Thus, as Wilhelmsen points out, "a failure in art need not be a failure in vision, but a failure in vision causes a failure in art." It is part of the critic's task to make us cognizant of that failure in vision.

If there has been a comparative neglect of such philosophical criticism among the American critics of our day, the reason is not difficult to discover. The intellectual and moral relativism of modern American criticism can have its roots in nothing less fundamental than the relativistic epistemology and metaphysics espoused by the vast majority of American intellectuals. Arthur Balfour, speaking of the British public, once remarked: "Our whole political machinery presupposes a people so fundamentally at one that they can safely afford to bicker." In applying this dictum to the field of criticism, perhaps "bicker" is too narrow a word to be applied to the wide areas of debate and discussion which are open for consideration. Nonetheless, the application can be made. In America today, is there enough agreement about fundamentals in philosophy to make for a sensible discussion of artistic and literary theory? It is difficult to see how either a significant national literature or a consistent critical temper can exist in the climate of an intellectual and moral relativism. It seems obvious that there can be no permanence and stability of evaluation, if there is no permanent and stable value. Today the idea of an objective, unchanging natural law, and of an absolute, unchanging truth, is hotly denied by countless litterateurs, intellectuals, and social scientists. It has been suggested that "the resulting confusion, the lack of a common ground, may explain why the man in the street today has no poet and the popular lecture hall no philosopher." And it may explain, too, why the creative critic has all but passed away.

In his severe and searching study, *The Withered Branch*, D. S. Savage proposes for the critic the task of evaluating the "autotelic" quality of a novel on the basis of his own personal orientation to truth.

Like the arts of thought or fiction, that of criticism presupposes a disciplinary orientation to truth on the part of its practitioner, and like them its power is immeasurably reinforced when this orientation is not only artistic but first of all existential . . . there can be no essential discontinuity between the mind he brings to his critical work and that which he takes to the rest of his human concerns.

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In an age of intellectual relativism, then, the difficulty is obvious. As Savage points out: "Art is speech, and speech is ultimately impossible when there is no absolute existential relation to truth. The relation to truth which is implicit in the practice of art cannot be permanently sustained when truth is withdrawn from existence."

When intellectual indifferentism is applied to the field of values, it becomes something akin to the much-quoted and widely-espoused theories of the ethical philosopher, Ralph Barton Perry. Value, for him, is "that special character of an object which consists in the fact that interest is taken in it." In fact, with regard to the formal constituent of such values he says: "To like or dislike an object is to create that object's value." Now the application of these principles to literature inevitably results in the type of critical relativism represented by Frederick Pottle, who feels that the fullest and most satisfactory results in literary criticism may be achieved "by making the aesthetic judgment wholly within the naturalistic (which means relativistic) assumptions."

There is room, it is true, for a certain relativity in criticism, since we can never authoritatively define either what a work of literature is or what it uniquely means. Intellectual indifferentism, however, can never approach to knowledge of truth. The novelist, in the books that have grown from his viewing of experience, has committed himself and has spoken his convictions. It is the part of the reader and the critic, then, as rational creatures, not to submit passively to him, but to examine what is spoken and to see it in relation to their own understanding of life. Their criticism must be a moral criticism, a judgment passed on the values incarnated in a novel and on the objective foundation of those values in the world of reality.

The case has been admirably stated by F. R. Leavis. He finds that "the Great Tradition" of the English novel (Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad) is essentially distinguished by "a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity." Its greatness consists in the fact that "it does not offer an 'aesthetic' value that is separable from moral significance." And such a literature, he feels, demands a corresponding moral seriousness in its criticism. After enunciating the nature of the moral beliefs of George Eliot, Professor Leavis proclaims himself as "sharing these beliefs, admirations and disapprovals, so that the reader knows my bias at once. And they seem to me favorable to the production of great literature. I will add (exposing myself completely) that the enlightenment or aestheticism or sophistication that feels an amused superiority to them leads, in my view, to triviality and boredom, and that out of triviality comes evil." Although we could hardly agree with Professor Leavis as to the soundness of George Eliot's moral philosophy, still his unambiguous stand represents the highest kind of moral seriousness and critical sincerity.



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Is it too much to ask that we stop allowing the stylistic or imaginative genius of an author to blind us to his fundamental lack of vision, or to the emptiness of the philosophical and moral vacuum in which he chooses to pontificate? The true critic has no right to be intimidated by genius. He has no right to fall into that irrational fear, proper to the American intellectual, of criticizing the validity of another man's ideas. In our fear of dogmatism, we must not allow ourselves to be swept into the morass of indifferentism.

IT MAY safely be predicted that the common objections to the type of criticism here proposed will be these: What possible purpose can be served by evaluating a non-Christian literary work on the basis of a Christian philosophy? Is it legitimate to analyze such writers as Sinclair Lewis or D. H. Lawrence in terms of free will or the analogy of being? Is it not unjust to criticize a novel for not containing something which its author never intended it to contain?

The function of the critic which gives the answer to these objections, and which we have already seen in some detail, is that of relating his reading of a novel to his own understanding of life. The critic, if he is honest and sincere, will approach his task of criticism with the same mind he brings to his other human concerns. He has, if he is a thinking man, a personal vision of life. If he is not a professed Christian, he will use as his norm of criticism *some* philosophy of life, and the merit of his critical estimate will then be measured by the objective validity of his estimate of the meaning of life as a whole. And if he is a Christian, the critic will appreciate and analyze and evaluate in terms of a Christian philosophy. It is a matter of fundamental honesty, toward oneself and toward others.

When, for example, the Christian critic reads Sinclair Lewis' *Arrowsmith*, he will perhaps admire Martin Arrowsmith and Dr. Max Gottlieb for their passionate devotion to the cause of "pure science." At the same time, he will not hesitate to criticize Lewis for his lack of vision, for not realizing that these naturalistic men he has created are radically incomplete. Again, in his reading of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, the Christian will find much to admire in this non-Christian's handling of a significant problem—the problem of an individual trying to communicate with another on the deepest level of his being. Yet surely it is legitimate for such a critic to point out the reason for Lawrence's failure, to show that Paul Morel's problem cannot be solved without the realization of divine love, of free will, and of the ultimate end of man.

What we must remember above all is that the critic, for all he is a critic, is still an apostle of the truth. He should attempt, it is true, to establish common grounds for discussion. In the last analysis, however, it is not his place to accept the hypotheses of other men, but rather to judge the premises of other men in accordance with what he himself believes to be true. We have had enough of logical analysis. The time has come to question the premises.

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# Frost and Cyclicalism

BY RICHARD D. LORD

**I**N *The Myth of the Eternal Return* by Mircea Eliade, another expression has been given to the problem of myth and history. This book is particularly interesting to the Catholic student of literature since the cyclical view of time and history which it presents has somehow found its way into the thought processes and attitudes of many modern poets.

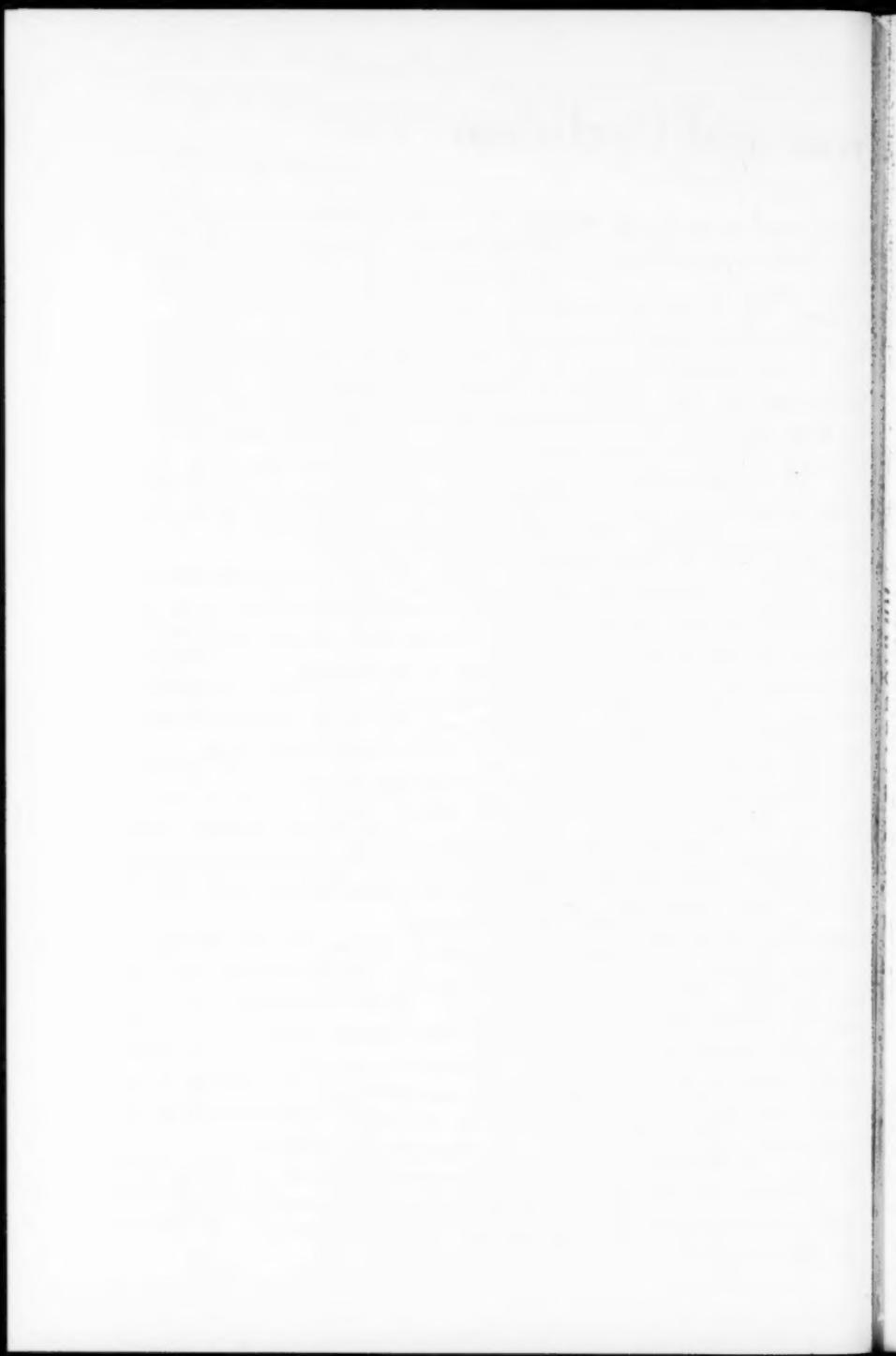
Eliade distinguishes two types of men, historical man and traditional man. Historical man, the man interested in history, is the modern man. He is also (in a large sense) the man of faith and of optimism who believes that things can become permanently better. Such a man creates history by seeking an historical insight in his attempt to report the past and discern meaning in it. On the other hand, Eliade presents the traditional or prehistoric man of archaic civilizations, the man of despair with a negative attitude towards history, the man to whom the succession of things and events is unsettling.

This negative attitude towards history manifests itself in a movement towards the creation of an archetype and in a cyclical or astral theory. When people in the culture of these archaic civilizations attempt to handle history the historical hero is lifted out and put outside of history as an archetype, thus tending to transform the event into myth and to make of it a rule of conduct. Accompanying this tendency is the use of a cyclical imagery, finding its expression in such symbols as the movement of stars, the dance, and the image of the bridge.

With this background in mind, an investigation into the field of modern poetry to discover whether traces of such cyclical imagery are present, or at least to discover what use is made of the sense of time, may be revealing, for it will indicate to what extent such a pagan influence has been felt in contemporary literature. For reasons which will be explained I have selected as my subject Robert Frost and his poem "West-Running Brook."

Some time ago Amy Lowell, in *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*, referred to Robert Frost as being "plastic and passive," in the sense that he allows nature to impress upon him what mark it will. In her own words, "Mr. Frost is anxious to trace accurately the markings burnt into the sensitive plate of his mind." He is, to put it another way, a spokesman of nature, viewing the typical natural phenomena of the New England countryside with the passivity of an oracle, giving way to utterance only as that indefinable something manifests itself to a mind oblivious to all else but the necessity that moves it.

In recent years this attitude of passivity has changed. H. H. Watts, in an article occurring in the March, 1955 issue of *American Literature*, has taken up the question of this "interrupted dialogue," relying primarily for his ideas on



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"West-Running Brook." Watts points out that Frost's active-passive relationship between nature and man is giving way to the suggestion that perhaps after all man can "send up" instead of merely reflect, a tendency that manifests itself more and more in the poems succeeding "West-Running Brook."

Considering these views, it becomes possible to take "West-Running Brook" as perhaps typical of the new Frost, or at least as indicative of the beginnings of a trend moving in a characteristic fashion throughout his later poetry. If this be so, a further examination of this poem may be rewarding to one who seeks Frost's attitude towards the meaning of time, a question with which so many modern poets have become preoccupied. Keeping in mind the cyclical view of time and history, we may therefore ask ourselves to what extent Frost is affected by this cyclicalism—whether he, too, is influenced by it or whether he arrives at a different solution.

"West-Running Brook" is a dialogue between a young man and his wife standing beside the brook. The poem opens with the wife asking her husband, "Fred, where is north?" He points off in the direction of north, at the same time telling her that the brook runs west. She replies by indicating briefly her puzzlement with this behavior of the brook in running west instead of east, but she finds a tentative solution in the possibility that it "Can trust itself to go by contraries," just as she and her husband can. She attempts to find a reason for this independence in the relationship between her husband and herself, but cannot. He suggests that perhaps it is because they are "young or new." She pauses, thinking, "We must be something"; then, abandoning the idea, she suggests confirming their union with the brook by building a bridge across it.

At this point the wife finds that the brook recognizes her sentiment:

Look, look, it's waving to us with a wave  
To let us know it hears me.

Her husband begins to tell her that the wave has always been there, and here the poet interrupts with an explanation of the phenomenon—the stream flows over a sunken rock whose resistance causes a wave to fling itself backward against the current. The wife, however, still sees a significance in this action as directed personally to her, but when her husband laughingly says, "It is your brook! I have no more to say!" she begs him to continue, for she realizes that he does have something to say.

The latter part of the poem contains the philosophizing of the husband. He takes up the idea of contraries which had been previously mentioned and finds in the wave a symbol of life moving back against the stream of being. Existence, he says, does not stand still, but flows away; it is "unresisted" except by a "resistance in itself":

It is this backward motion toward the source,  
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,

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The tribute of the current to the source.  
It is from this in nature we are from.  
It is most us.

IF WE examine the poem, first of all, for indications of cyclical imagery, it becomes evident that the brook itself is of its very nature cyclical. Every stream is part of a process, and one cannot say precisely where that process begins or ends. One of the elementary truths that a high-school pupil learns in his science class is the circular process of the flow of water—stream, river, ocean, mist, rain, stream—and on it goes, with the rigorous and inevitable flow of the indestructibility of matter. In the stream itself the ripple of the water remains unchanged; the matter moves forward to seek the ocean, but the form remains captured in its instant.

In the course of the dialogue which frames the poem one of the first things which occur to the wife is the thought of building a bridge. It is not strange that this bridge symbolism should occur; contemporary poetry is filled with it. It fascinates T. S. Eliot with the suggestion of a dream state in "The Waste Land":

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge . . .

It captivates the imagination of Hart Crane when, in "To Brooklyn Bridge," it becomes the object of a prayer, a symbol of derangement become rearranged:

Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend  
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

Of its nature it expresses a coupling of disparities, an overflow from one form into another, an ultimate unity to be achieved.

The most important of these images is that which occurs within the stream itself. At this point in the poem Frost interjects a parenthesis:

The black stream, catching on a sunken rock,  
Flung backward on itself in one white wave,  
And the white water rode the black forever,  
Not gaining but not losing, like a bird  
White feathers from the struggle of whose breast  
Flecked the dark stream and flecked the darker pool  
Below the point, and were at last driven wrinkled  
In a white scarf against the far shore alders.

Significant here is the flinging backward to the source. It is an interruption to this constant flow of the stream, yet nevertheless an interruption that partakes of the very essence of the stream and runs counter to it, "forever" and "Not gaining but not losing." Is there a suggestion here of the attitude of Yeats that history and the suffering it brings are justified because time is suspended or, as Eliade points out, its virulence diminished? Furthermore, the husband says,

That wave's been standing off this jut of shore



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Ever since rivers, I was going to say,  
Were made in heaven. . . .

In this sense each moment is the same, and yet there is a harking back to an archetypal stream placed outside of history when rivers "Were made in heaven."

Considered objectively these images partake of a definite cyclical character. It is interesting as well as enlightening to see precisely what use Frost makes of this imagery and to what extent, either consciously or subconsciously, he subscribes to its suggestions.

There is, first of all, a significance in the very name of the brook—"West-Running Brook"—and the question which the reader first asks is why the brook runs west, since its geographical position indicates it should have a normal eastward flow. This is also the first question asked by the woman in the poem when she becomes aware of the direction of its flow, and there is a certain petulance in her query:

What does it think it's doing running west  
When all the other country brooks flow east  
To reach the ocean?

It is as if she were saying, "What right does it have to be a nonconformist when everything else obediently follows the rules?" This is an important question because its answer reflects so much of Robert Frost. The brook (if we may be momentarily guilty of a form of the pathetic fallacy) knows that its destination is the ocean. However, it does not go the way of other brooks to reach its destination—it goes by contraries; it takes the opposite direction, although eventually finding its end in the same ocean. This is in itself the beginning of an indication of a revolt to be carried out and expressed more completely in the image of the stream going back upon itself.

Not only the stream but also the man and woman go by contraries:

It must be the brook  
Can trust itself to go by contraries  
The way I can with you—and you with me—  
Because we're—we're—I don't know what we are.

There seems to be an indication here of Frost's debt to Emerson. Recalling that Frost himself has said that the philosophies which most influenced him during his early years were those of Emerson and James, one can see in this poem a great deal of dependence on Emersonian individualism, particularly as expressed in the essay on "Self-Reliance." But more directly applicable to "West-Running Brook" is Emerson's question, "What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions if I live wholly from within?" and his dogmatic statement, "Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist." Here is the clue—the brook is a nonconformist; the husband and wife are nonconformists.

This nonconformity, however, is not extolled for its own sake. Noncon-

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## FROST AND CYCLISM

formity and self-reliance in Emerson are dependent upon the conviction that self-trust is a trust in God Himself, for "Self-Reliance" is merely a declaration of the meaning of "The Over-Soul." Because man is a part of the great stream of being he is himself divine; therefore his peace comes in individualism and self-expression unhampered by any voluntary activity. In another sense such ideas express the Protestant ethic in its optimism and spirit of faith in the future.

Is there a conflict in Frost between cyclicalism and self-reliance? In "West-Running Brook" the brook itself is a cyclical image; it runs down to the sea and the process goes over again, and there is no doubt that the eternal flux of Heraclitus is symbolized, at least objectively, in the flowing of it. The close connection, however, between the individuality of Frost's brook and the self-reliance of Emerson suggests that the brook is not a victim of eternal flux—or rather that it is, but it is not. As it is a stream, it is in eternal flux; as it is west-running instead of east-running, it opposes eternal flux. The striking fact about this image is that the resistance to determinism arises out of the very nature of determinism, just as the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance arises out of the very nature of the ebb and flow of the stream of being, or rather out of the very identity of the individual with the stream. This will be seen more specifically and concretely in the image of the stream flowing back upon itself.

The next image which occurs is that of the bridge, which, as has been pointed out, is also typically cyclic. The question to be asked here is what Frost meant by it; does it express a unity in which disparate time is blended into one? The answer lies in what precedes the image. The brook goes by contraries, as the husband and wife go by contraries. For the wife the brook becomes a symbol of the relationship between her husband and herself, and she therefore attempts to identify the two of them with the brook:

As you and I are married to each other,  
We'll both be married to the brook.

The union achieved in marriage thus becomes a symbol of spiritual union, which of course is identity:

and the bridge shall be  
Our arm thrown over it asleep beside it.

Here is unity, not in contradictory, but in contrariety. The suggestion again is thematic.

This "West-Running Brook" in addition to being a symbol of the relationship in contrariety between the husband and the wife is also an obvious symbol of nature. No actual identity other than symbolic is attained, for, as H. H. Waggoner has pointed out, "Not infrequently in Frost's poetry this sense of the unity of man and nature, while it never blurs the distinction between man and the lower forms of life and the inanimate, becomes a longing for an almost mythical identification with nature." However, the symbol appears to be a



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striving towards a unity with nature in the sense of Emerson's "Over-Soul," for if man is essentially a part of the eternal flux or the stream of being he will, according to Emerson, be able to be self-reliant, non-conforming, even "contrary."

**I**N THE latter part of the poem the husband seizes upon this backward motion of the stream to philosophize upon its meaning. At this point the stream becomes for him not the eternal flux of Heraclitus but a flood of entropy—"The stream of everything that runs away." The "white wave that runs counter to itself" is symbolical of man in his "impatience of the steps," striving to return to the "beginning of beginnings."

In the lines which follow, Frost makes a statement which definitely rejects the cyclic view:

Some say existence like a Pirouot  
And Pirouette, forever in one place,  
Stands still and dances, but it runs away,  
It seriously, sadly runs away  
To fill the abyss' void with emptiness.

This is quite the opposite of what T. S. Eliot says in "Burnt Norton," and one may justifiably assume from the clarity of the reference that Frost intends to set himself up as unmistakably opposing Eliot's view. The use of the dance imagery, of the "Pirouot" and "Pirouette" is very similar to the same image in these lines from "Burnt Norton":

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement.

This dance imagery is closely related to the theory of the archetype because it is traditionally a ritual, sacred in its imitation of something outside time. It is further related to the cyclic theory because it is cyclical in its movement, and Frost brings this out in his choice of names for the dancers—"Pirouot" and "Pirouette." However, he emphasizes this negation of the dance of life by his repetition of "runs away," repeating the subject and modifying the action by the adverbs "seriously" and "sadly."

The stream, then, "runs away," and this is for Frost both a serious and a sad thing. Life takes on a pessimism and a necessity from this entropy, just as it does from a cyclical view of existence. It differs, however, from the cyclical necessity which can comfort itself by saying, "I've been through all this before," because now there is nothing one can do but flow along with the movement, without hope of a return:

But it flows over us. It flows between us  
To separate us for a panic moment.  
It flows between us, over us, and *with us*.

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## FROST AND CYCLISM

There is, however, one hope. In the midst of this flow of the stream it suddenly catches upon a rock, and water is flung backward against the current. Frost is at pains to point out that so also in life the flood of entropy is resisted "by some strange resistance in itself." What is unusual about this resistance is that it is

Not just a swerving, but a throwing back,  
As if regret were in it and were sacred.

In one sense the image here is cyclical because

The fall of most of it is always  
Raising a little, sending up a little.

There is a circular pattern faintly suggested in the flow of the stream being caught up, flung back, down, and up again, but Frost appears to attach a different significance to it.

The clue to the poem and its strange wavering between cyclicalism and entropy can perhaps be found in the fact that although Frost appears to be using what is objectively a cyclic image, the brook and its constant flow, a feeling of the world's sterility and defeat is transferred to the brook so that contrary to its nature it becomes a symbol of entropy for those who cannot understand its more profound meaning. Judging from the manner in which the image is used, perhaps Frost himself subconsciously felt this sterility.

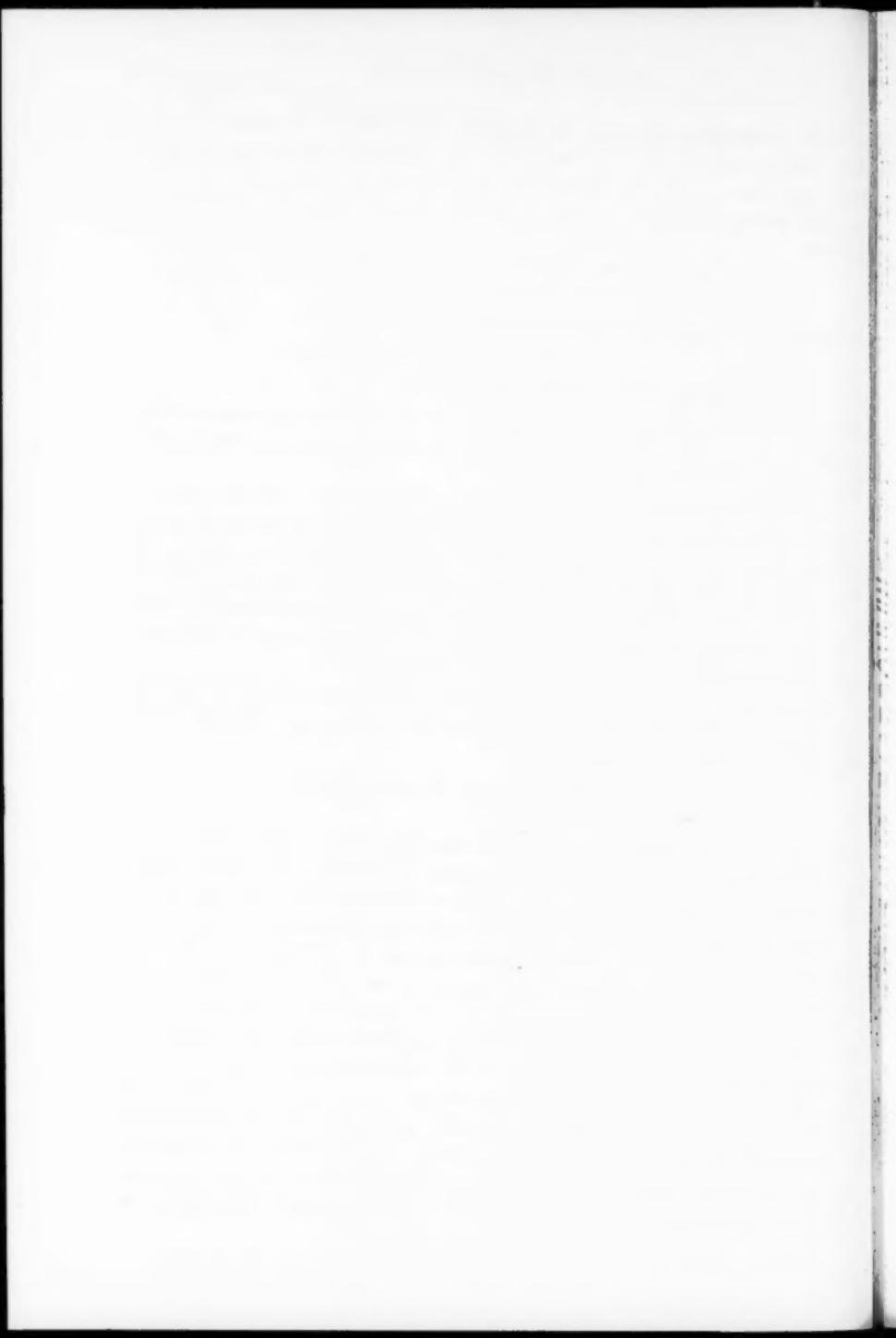
Be this as it may, the reaction is to find a perpetual moment of stability, which appears to be discovered in the image of the "sending up." For the "sending up" is an unchanging instant:

And the white water rode the black forever,  
Not gaining but not losing . . .

This appears to be Frost's concept of the meaning of life—man is part of the stream of being, but his individualism consists in "sending up" a riffle towards the source. He is bound by fate, and yet he has freedom. Is it, however, merely a token freedom? The riffle in the stream does not accomplish very much; the inexorable flow continues, with the suggestion that it will some day run out. Perhaps there is a hint here of a vain longing for the cyclic permanence; as the wheel turns, the cyclist finds a consolation in his knowledge that the same phase will recur again, forever. And yet the larger implications of Frost's image lead precisely to the cyclic view. The water of the stream must return again from the sea, through mist and rain, and the process goes over and over, while in the midst of it man continually sends up his riffle and thereby achieves permanence.

Returning to the point from which we began, we may say that the dissolution of history in the archaic civilizations comes about because of a drive to create symbols. But neither the human person nor events connected with persons are

(Continued on page 31)



# Eliot's Magi

BY MOTHER MARY ELEANOR, S.H.C.J.

T. S. ELIOT'S "Journey of the Magi" is a deceptively simple poem. It seems on the surface to be a straightforward narrative, justifying its existence by giving the Biblical account a fresh twist. Here are real people, encountering a real experience—not the usual, flat, stylized figures of a Christmas pageant. Yet even on a surface reading, the three trees, the dicers for silver, and the white horse carry implications of the crucifixion and the last judgment. They suggest that one cannot journey toward Bethlehem without encountering the whole scheme of redemption. Rebirth is the only adequate response.

Perhaps it is the curious contemporaneity of the poem which first points the reader to a second level of meaning. This is Eliot's legacy from the Nativity Sermon of Lancelot Andrewes, from which he takes his opening lines, changing them to the first person for greater immediacy. The colloquial tone, the attitude of the magus toward the "villages, dirty and charging high prices," and the understatement, place the narrator psychologically more in the twentieth century than in the first. The effect is of superimposing the present on the past, suggesting Auden's *For the Time Being*, without Auden's irony. Eliot does not here share Auden's aim of criticizing the contemporary scene.

When the poem is reread from this angle, other details stand out as somewhat unexpected in a first-century journey. They tease one into searching for meaning. They have the quality, common in symbols, of almost fitting, but not quite, when taken on a merely literal level. Moreover, the form does not receive adequate explanation on the level of surface meaning. There is little occasion for a structural break in the poem till the magi have completed their journey and the narrator breaks off, unable to describe what they have seen. But Eliot has divided his poem into three parts, each with a tonal quality of its own, insufficiently explained by just the shift in scenery. Since the breaks in Eliot's poems are clues to meaning, the form suggests a journey in three stages, each stage quite different in tone. The images suggest a spiritual journey, in which the first part starts with solicitations to sensuality and ends in night, the second shifts from difficulty to plenitude, and the third contains an indescribable vision which leads paradoxically to death and birth.

The journey thus sketched begins to take on familiar outlines to anyone acquainted with the writings of St. John of the Cross or St. Teresa. The landmarks on the journey of Eliot's magi bear striking resemblance to the classically described stages of the Way of the Mystics. Eliot's references to the works of St. John of the Cross and other spiritual writers in his various essays give justification for assuming that he is familiar with such mystical literature. Read on this level, Eliot's magi

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## ELIOT'S MAGI

are not only the first-century figures of St. Matthew's gospel; they are those in any age who embark in pain and difficulty on the Way of Perfection.

IT IS pertinent, therefore, to look with some detail at the three stages of the Mystic Way, which writers on Mystical Theology term respectively the Purgative, the Illuminative, and the Unitive Way. St. John of the Cross speaks of them as three "nights," which he describes as follows in Book I of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*:

The journey of the soul to the divine union is called night for three reasons. The first is derived from the point from which the soul sets out, the privation of all pleasure in all the things of this world, by detachment therefrom. This is as night for every desire and sense of man. The second, from the road by which it travels, that is faith, for faith is obscure like night to the understanding. The third, from the goal to which it tends, God, incomprehensible and infinite, Who in this life is as night to the soul. We must pass through these three nights if we are to attain to the divine union with God.

The first is the "Night of Sense," which is "the privation and purgation from all sensual desires in all outward things of this world, all the pleasures of the flesh and all satisfactions of the will," to quote further from *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. This first stage is suggested in the first section of Eliot's poem. The tone of this section is that of unrest and nervous tension. It suggests struggle, weakness, weariness, tormenting contrasts between will and sense. "As the husbandman, greedy of the harvest, goads the oxen . . ." writes St. John of the Cross, shifting his metaphor, "so concupiscence goads the soul harnessed to its desires, till it shall obtain its will." The soul, "stained by its desires," becomes "intellectually blind, the will becomes torpid, the memory fails, and every lawful function is disordered."

Each of these details, all drawn from the first book of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, finds a counterpart in Eliot's symbols. The summer palaces, the silken girls bringing sherbet, the camel-drivers wanting their liquor and their women, suggest the temptations to sensuality. Eliot's refractory camels present in reverse image the same state of soul depicted by St. John's oxen, goaded by the greedy husbandman. The camel-drivers running away suggest the mutinous will, tempted to abandon its task of keeping the flesh in order.

Gradually, the soul passing through this initial purgation encounters a new trial, on a higher level of experience—the withdrawal of spiritual consolation. It derives no sensible joy from spiritual exercises which previously were easy and pleasant. It must learn to walk by faith. The night-fires going out in Eliot's poem suggest this gradual withdrawal of consolation, the villages charging high prices the costliness of spiritual conquest in terms of the renouncement of creature comfort. When the magi finally prefer to travel all night, we seem to have



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come to the *Via Negativa* described by St. John of the Cross near the end of Book I of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* in a series of maxims:

That thou mayest have pleasure in everything, seek pleasure in nothing.  
That thou mayest know everything, seek to know nothing.  
That thou mayest possess all things, seek to possess nothing.  
That thou mayest be everything, seek to be nothing. . . .

By this route of arduous detachment the soul is brought to the threshold of the Illuminative Way, and Eliot is drawing to the end of Section I of his poem. At this juncture, the soul may be seriously assailed with temptations to turn back. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, in his treatment of the Mystic Way in his book *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, describes the condition of such a soul when it has almost attained the Illuminative Way: "Some souls, after struggling for a long time, become discouraged when they are only a few steps from the fountain of living water. . . . [They] run the risk of turning away from God and of placing their last end in the satisfaction of their pride or their concupiscences. . . ." Eliot's magi were assailed by this temptation:

. . . the voices singing in our ears, saying  
That this was all folly.

"Then at dawn we came down into a temperate valley," reports the magus, ushering in the second stage of the journey. The tone changes. The lines lengthen out and become less nervously emphatic. The soul has come, in its spiritual journey, on a new plenitude. It has passed into the Illuminative Way, which will lead it, if it is faithful, to the threshold of divine union.

THE second stage of the interior life has characteristics quite different from the first. The soul is henceforth more acted upon than acting, having abandoned itself to God's action. Its prayer becomes increasingly the passive prayer of contemplation, under the impulse of grace. St. Teresa of Avila describes this shift in prayer in her *Life* in terms of watering a garden which has been planted and weeded with much effort. It can be watered in four ways: "by taking water from a well, which costs us great labor; or by a water-wheel and buckets, when the water is drawn by a windlass; . . . or by a stream or brook, which waters the ground much better; . . . or by a heavy rain, when the Lord waters it by no labor of ours." The first method belongs to the Purgative Way, the second and third to the Illuminative, the fourth to the Unitive, to equate St. Teresa's scheme with the usual three-fold division. Just so, Eliot's temperate valley is "wet" and "smelling of vegetation," and possesses both a "running stream" and a "water-mill." But, though dawn approaches, the water-mill is still "beating in darkness."

The Illuminative Way, like the Purgative, has its own characteristic renunciations. Over this stage in its journey hovers the cross—or as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange points out in *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus*, three

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## ELIOT'S MAGI

crosses. Since the soul is still not perfect, some of its sufferings are more punitive than purifying. They are like the cross of the impenitent thief. Others of its crosses, because self-chosen and partly natural in inspiration, are more like the cross of the penitent thief than like the redemptive cross of Christ. Yet more and more, its sufferings are supernatural in origin and redemptive in value. They bear definite resemblance to the cross of Christ. And so, it is appropriate to the Illuminative Way that three crosses cast their shadow over the second section of Eliot's poem—"three trees over a low sky."

Other symbols thrust themselves up through this section of the poem. There are the vine-leaves and wine-skins, suggestive of the Eucharist; yet the vine-leaves grow about a tavern, and the wine-skins are empty. They imply the possible despoilment of supernatural goods. There is such a thing as spiritual gluttony, which may assail the soul at this stage. St. John of the Cross has a good deal to say of it in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*: "He who rejoices in supernatural goods falls, in my opinion, into . . . deceit and self-deceit, loss of faith, vain glory and other vanities."

He goes on further to state that it may lead men so far "that they seek to purchase with money, not only those gifts and graces . . . but holy things also, and—I cannot write it without trembling—things divine." Eliot's "six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver" seem to connect with this thought, though they carry implications too of Judas and of the soldiers gambling for Christ's robe. It is obvious that there would be "no information" for the soul in such a region of spiritual self-indulgence and betrayal.

IT IS evening when the magi finally arrive, for they have been a long time on their journey. Evening here suggests postponement; the magi have dallied on their way. They reach their destination "not a moment too soon." One is reminded of the description which St. John of the Cross gives in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* of the tardy arrival of some souls: "And in the end, when our Lord has compassion on them, and leads them on in spite of these hindrances, they arrive late, with much difficulty, and less merit, because they have not submitted themselves to His ways. . . ."

Eliot's poem breaks off at this point. We know of the final arrival—the symbolic equivalent of divine union—only by understatement and fragmentary utterance. Yet this reticence, this brokenness of speech, is true to the mystical experience of the Unitive Way. It is, of its nature, incommunicable. Thus St. John of the Cross says, just at the end of *The Living Flame of Love*, "I would not speak of this breathing of God, neither do I wish to do so, because I am certain that I cannot; and indeed were I to speak of it, it would seem something less than it is in reality. . . . This breathing is full of grace and glory . . . whereby He inspired it with the love of Himself, transcending all glory and understanding. This is the reason why I say nothing more."



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This contact between the soul and God is not only ineffable but also fleeting; but its effects are deep and permanent, so that it is spoken of as the "transforming union." This transformation is a sort of death, but it issues in life. St. John of the Cross explains that there are two kinds of "life," both of them preceded by "death." One is "beatific, consisting of the vision of God, and this must be preceded by a natural and bodily death." The other is "the perfect spiritual life, consisting of the possession of God by the union of love." Men attain to this through "death" to the old life. Both of these kinds of death and life figure in Eliot's last stanza, held in suspension, along with Christ's birth and death, in the paradoxical play on the words *Death* and *Birth*. This spiritual birth that has been "like Death, our death," has been "hard and bitter agony for us." The magi have been afflicted and tormented "to the utmost limit of their strength," to use the words of St. John of the Cross to describe that travail in *The Living Flame*. The result is a divine discontent with the world as it is,

. . . in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.

There is an increasing desire to go to God, in that other, physical death which will bring the soul to the Beatific Vision. St. Teresa has expressed this homesickness of the soul for God after mystical union in characteristic hyperbole: "Alas, alas, Lord! How long is this exile, and how, as I endure it, do I suffer out of desire for my God!" And yet again: "Oh, that one might die at the hands of love. . . . O life, that art the enemy of my welfare. . . ." (*Exclamations of the Soul to God*, XV). The magus speaks in more restrained idiom, but the sense is the same:

. . . no longer at ease here . . .  
I should be glad of another death.

ONE more symbol in Eliot's poem, already mentioned briefly, remains to be investigated—the old white horse in the meadow. It seems oddly out of place on the literal level, alien to Judean landscape. Nor has it any function in carrying forward, on the second level of meaning, the mystical experience. Bearing, as it does, associations with St. John's Apocalypse, it seems to point to a third level of meaning in the poem—a universal, eschatological level. Are Eliot's magi not only the first-century figures of St. Matthew's gospel and those in every age who embark in pain and difficulty on the arduous Way of the Mystics, but also the whole human race, moving toward the fulfillment of the Christian dispensation?

There is much to corroborate such a third level of meaning. The first part of the poem suggests the slow journey of the human race toward the incarnation. Freeing itself gradually and fitfully from the solicitations of pagan cultures, it comes on a period of expectancy, when prophecy waters and makes fertile the

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## ELIOT'S MAGI

destiny of mankind. The incarnation is at hand. But the moment of the redemption is also the moment of the great rejection. The tavern suggests the world—historically the world of the Jews, rejecting Christ in the crucifixion, symbolically the world which rejects Him in every age. The vine-leaves suggest Christ's metaphor of the vine and the branches, uttered after the Last Supper. The wine has been drunk from the wine-skins of the Eucharist and the wine-skins are empty. Mankind has despiled its great gift. In spite of the first epiphany at Bethlehem, the bulk of mankind has either rejected revelation or still lives unenlightened in the old dispensation.

Eliot's thoughts on this third, deferred epiphany are gathered into the symbol of the white horse, which St. John in his *Apocalypse* used to signify Christ's Second Coming. The early Christians expected it would be soon; but there were certain conditions to be fulfilled first. The nations must accept the Christian dispensation. They have not done so yet, though centuries have passed. And so, in Eliot's poem, the white horse is old, and at the approach of footsteps, he gallops away in the meadow.

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## T. S. Eliot's Poetry: The Quest and the Way

(Continued from page 10)

mankind, faces this "fear in a handful of dust" and endures his trials is man able to "Redeem/The time. Redeem/The unread vision in the higher dream." Time and history are the records of man's drawing near to God; they do not guarantee the action. For man to come into intimate contact with the deity, he must recognize his own guilt and imperfections, suffer the agonies of purgation, and set out on the Way which recapitulates in concentrated and individual form the whole history of religious consciousness.

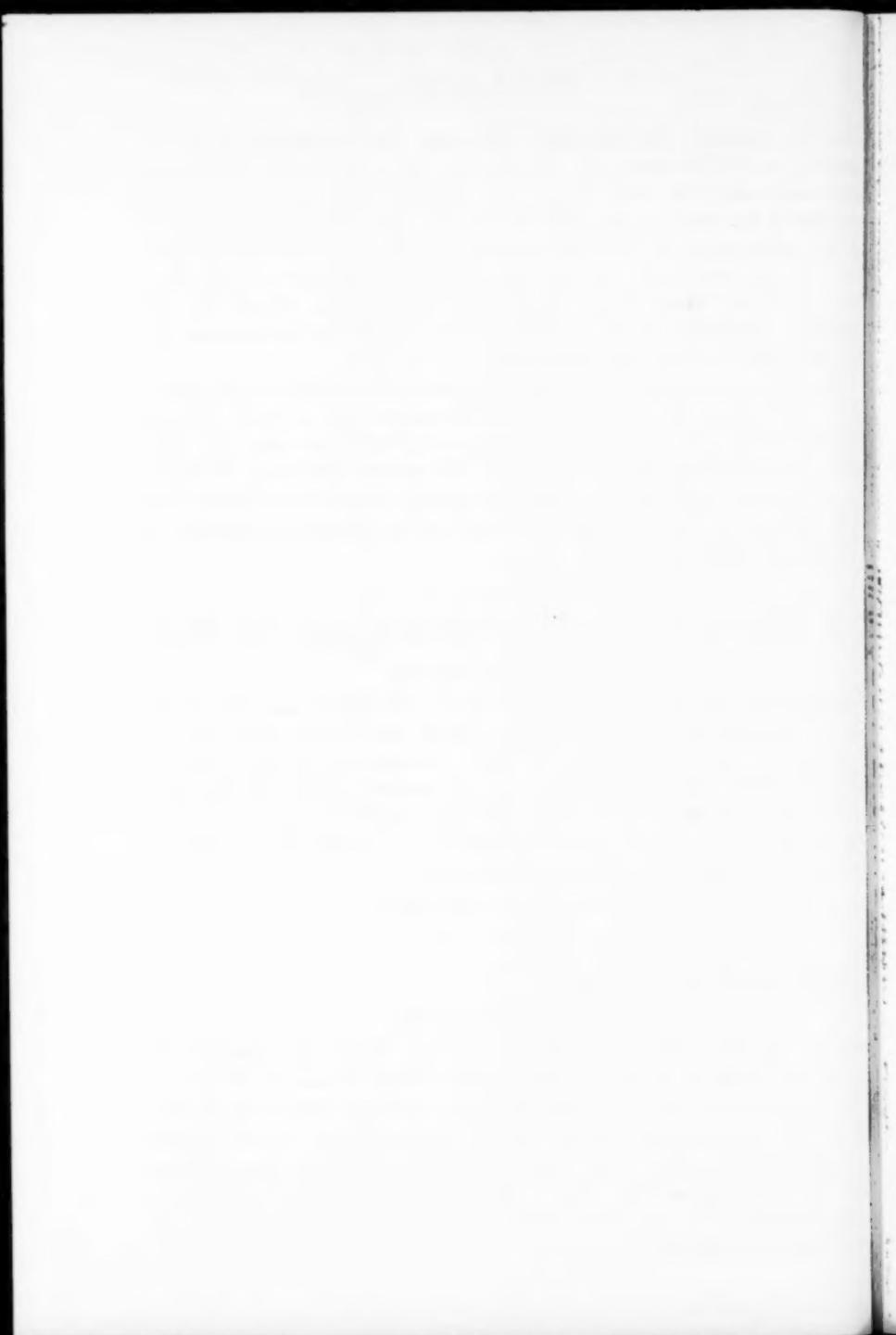
(Continued in the next issue)

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## Frost and Cyclicalism

(Continued from page 25)

symbols. To erect a person into a symbol one must abstract his personality and remove him from the existential system. Only Christ, because of His personality, is a symbol for there is no other like Him; and hence when Christ is made the central event in history, history need not generate a myth. In the Catholic economy, therefore, there is no place for cyclicalism. By their natures things come out from God, but they return to Him only through Christ, for His Person is the Word and His very name means a symbol—the symbol of the Father. Here alone is a person who is a symbol.



# Review-Article

## Baudelaire and the Impossible Art

*Les Fleurs du Mal.* By Charles Baudelaire. Translated by Alan Conder. London: Cassell.

*The Flowers of Evil.* By Charles Baudelaire. Translated by William Aggeler. Foreword by Y. G. Le Dañec. American Literary Guild. \$6.00.

*The Flowers of Evil.* By Charles Baudelaire. Selected and edited by Marthiel and Jackson Mathews. New Directions. \$6.00.

PUBLICATION within the last five years of at least three more endeavors to render into English the complete text of the *Fleurs du Mal* is evidence, no doubt, that recognition of Baudelaire as a major poet is in our time taken for granted. His fame seems, throughout the Western literary world, so secure that from now on we may expect further versions of his masterpiece to continue appearing with the industrious frequency to which already the translators of Homer, Virgil and Dante have accustomed us. It is obvious that in an age when ability to decipher Greek and Latin is virtually an occult science, and casual competence in a modern language (not excepting one's own) an erudite achievement, translation is becoming more than ever a necessary art. Necessary perhaps, but to what extent also a *possible* art? For, experience suggests, if what is possible is not always necessary, what is necessary may not invariably be possible.

Between translation of poetry and that of prose the difference is surely of kind, not degree. A competent prose rendering will carry over, we know, a fairly adequate portion of an author's meaning, and not alone in the case of books purporting simply to convey facts and ideas but in that of literary works as well. Even in ungainly and faulty translations the power of a Balzac, a Cervantes or a Dostoevsky will make itself felt. If, of course, the writer subjected to translation is a literary artist, a master of prose style, it is likely that during the process of transmittal many of his specific excellences will have evaporated. Yet not, I believe, too many. For generally speaking (if we except "poetic" prose, which at its best is clearly a variety of poetry), prose works *do* succeed in transcending limitations of country and culture: passage from native into unfamiliar idiom does *not* entail forfeiture of their essential virtues.

Poetry is less fortunate. It is, we know, possible to transmit from one tongue to another the substance of action and characterization, as in the case of narrative and dramatic poetry, or, as in that of didactic or philosophical poems, the "ideas." It is, moreover, possible to obtain rather precise equivalents of poetic images. But once "translated," the poetry itself, that something so difficult to define, seems mysteriously to have melted away. To many readers, indeed, the loss is not worth noticing. The Great Books people, for example: on none of their accredited lists are you likely to find the *Fleurs du Mal* or for that matter a single volume of lyrical or "pure" poetry. A work of art for them, one suspects, is something like a superior sort of orange: after pressing out the nourishing essence or juice ("ideas" or "content"), you toss away the unusable rind or "form." Now since an idea appears able to pass

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## REVIEW-ARTICLE

virtually intact from one language into another, it becomes unimportant whether one reads a work in the original or in translation. Preferably, perhaps, the latter, since mastery of a language (one's own again not excepted) requires an expenditure of time and intellectual force which might be more profitably invested in assimilating a few more "processed" and classified Great Ideas. Attention to mere *form* would be shocking pedantry.

Such an opinion rests upon a distinction which is, I am persuaded, as fallacious as it is pernicious. I refer to the attempted dissociation of "content" from "form," according to which the all-important thing would be "content": to it would be applied for purposes of prettification, a varnish labelled "form." But if this opinion is valid, why has no one yet taken the subject matter, the content, of, say, *Hamlet*, given it a more attractive because more "modern" form, and written a far more valuable play than Shakespeare's? The answer is that separation of a work of art (or for that matter anything else) into elements of content and form is not merely impossible: it is meaningless. That no kind of content can exist apart from *some* sort of form, however ugly, crude or chaotic that form may appear initially to be, is a truism that needs regularly to be re-emphasized. Would a man in safe possession of his skin remain essentially the same if he were flayed alive? I do not think so, yet he would still have some manner of shape or "form." To pretend therefore that ideas, impressions, images, well ordered and effectively expressed in one poem, are identical with "the same" ideas, impressions, images, clumsily and incoherently set forth in another poetic production—such pretension suffers from a serious disadvantage: it is simply not true. If, moreover, form and content are *not* separable, then a rendering of a poem which leaves out the poetry is hardly an adequate translation.

But in translation, must the poetry of necessity melt away? Is it impossible to carry over from one language to another the particular and essential qualities of a poem, those qualities which set it apart from the mass of mediocre verse or rhymed prose which, in all languages and cultures, most occasional and innocent readers of poetry prefer and demand? The German translations of Shakespeare are excellent, I am told, and likewise excellent the renderings of the *Fleurs du Mal* by Stefan George, himself a considerable and decidedly Baudelairean poet. I know too little German to pretend to an opinion in the matter. But I should maintain that, generally speaking, what passes for successful "translation" of poetry might more properly be termed original poetic achievement. Poet B, drawing upon resources made available by the genius of his own language but stimulated by the work of Poet A (who is disposing, in another tongue, of a different set of poetic possibilities), writes a good poem which he calls a translation. If as poet he surpasses A, he may conceivably have improved upon his model. Both of them will have written good poems, but by no means *the same* good poem.

The perils of translation and adaptation are depressingly exemplified in the struggles of French translators, from the time of Voltaire to that of André Gide, with the text of Shakespeare. But have the attempts at conveying to English and American readers an adequate idea of the poetry of the *Divine Comedy*, proven any more successful? For bumptious inanity, perhaps Rouse's assaults in peculiar prose upon both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (up-to-date Homer with, presumably, mass appeal) would be difficult to approach. Yet one shudders to



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think of the operation to which, were they to elect him their victim, Anglo-American translators would certainly subject a poet with whom (now that they have been pointed out) Baudelaire's affinities appear evident, the "tender" Racine.

Most people would agree that as translator, Baudelaire's own place is in the very first rank. His prose renderings of Poe's tales have received the praise they deserve. But the version of the poem *To My Mother* (Mrs. Clemm) which Baudelaire prefixed to the 1856 edition of those translations was a prose paraphrase. He seems in fact to have been so decidedly aware of the dangers and obstacles inhering in verse translation that, except for a rather tepid endeavor (for a fee which he failed to collect) to transmute into acceptable Alexandrines a few fragments of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, he abstained from all such exercises. Mallarmé's *Tombeau d'Edgar Poe* is a very fine sonnet, but in his *translations* of the American writer's poems, he, like Baudelaire, undertook nothing more ambitious than paraphrases in prose. Yet upon Mallarmé, as upon his master Baudelaire, and his disciple Valéry, the influence of the author of *Eureka* was decisive.

It was from Poe that these poets learned the supreme importance in poetical composition of the element which Valéry terms *charm* or incantation. This is, of course, a matter not merely of sound and rhythm. A poem composed of a succession of rhythmical sonorities altogether void of meaning would have at best limited or fortuitous powers of evocation. Not even the purest of "pure" poetry tries to go so far as that. The automatic writing of the surrealists aspires in spite of itself, perhaps, to signification of some sort. It is, moreover, misleading to speak of the "music" of poetry. Music and poetry are autonomous arts which attain their respective effects by very different means. The sounds expressed by musical notation differ in kind from the sounds expressed in words of a poem. Even in vocal music notes are far more important than words; but poetry cannot do without words. For words are in a very fundamental sense the materials of which poetry is made.

In any poem, then, it is no more possible to dissociate sound from sense—sonority and rhythm from intended and suggested meaning—than in literature, generally speaking, to separate form from content. For authentic poetry ("cette parole extraordinaire"), as Valéry tells us, "se fait connaître et reconnaître par le rythme et les harmonies qui la soutiennent et qui doivent être si intimement, et même si mystérieusement liés à sa génération, que le son et le sens ne puissent plus se séparer et se répondent indéfiniment dans la mémoire." He adds that "la poésie de Baudelaire doit sa durée et cet empire qu'elle exerce encore, à la netteté singulière de son timbre." Or, otherwise stated, Baudelaire possesses to a very high degree the power of *charm* or incantation essential to poetical composition. Of the poetical resources available in French he makes fullest possible use.

But the poetical resources of no two languages coincide. In means of expression as well as spirit, Swinburne and the writers of the Nineties were very much farther from Baudelaire than they imagined themselves to be. To find in English an equivalent not merely for the meaning but also for the *charm* of which, in French, Baudelaire's mastery has been so rarely equalled, is the translator's central problem. Each of the present Anglo-American versions of the *Fleurs du Mal* essays a different solution.

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## REVIEW-ARTICLE

William Aggeler elects that of prose paraphrase with, on the page facing each translation, the original text. This method (most happily illustrated in the Temple Classics edition of Dante, which contained, moreover, very full and serviceable notes) has substantial advantages. As an aid to understanding and appreciation of Baudelaire by a reader with some but not quite sufficient knowledge of French, I can think of nothing better. It is true that while (like the best modern editors) basing his work upon the 1861 text, Aggeler (like Marthiel and Jackson Mathews) undertakes to fit the suppressed poems into the places which they had occupied in the 1857 edition. This means, of course, a tampering not easy to justify with the "new architecture" which Baudelaire gave to the second edition of his book, while reprinting the condemned pieces in a separate volume (*Les Epaves*). Aggeler, while resigning himself to the loss of most of the poetry, concentrates upon rendering as exactly as possible the meaning of each poem. What he has attempted was worth doing and his work deserves praise. His version, while the least ambitious of the three, is doubtless the most useful.

Alan Conder follows the order of the posthumous edition of 1868 but does not include the French texts. Like Marthiel and Jackson Mathews he aspires to completeness: verse translations of all the poems in the *Fleurs du Mal*. He is not, of course, uniformly successful; but while by no means a major poet, he does offer us many agreeable poems. Readers without knowledge of French might conclude that Baudelaire was a pleasant minor poet, inferior, of course, to English and American poets of parallel inspiration. Let them be reassured: what Conder presents them is good Conder; but it is *not* Baudelaire.

Unlike Conder, Marthiel and Jackson Mathews include the French texts (with a well-filled sheet of errata) but tuck them away at the end of their book, where only the most obstinate reader is likely to trouble to look for them. In justification of such procedure it could be argued that confrontation of translation with text might appear, in some instances, gratuitously unkind. Also unlike Conder, who undertakes to translate all the poems himself, Marthiel and Jackson Mathews believe in division of labor. Theirs is like the Cambridge histories a cooperative enterprise, for the execution of which they employ a corps of translators, living and dead, of widely varying degrees of talent and celebrity. There are including Conder, imported for the occasion, and Mathews himself no fewer than thirty of them—thirty-one if one counts "Michael Field" as two persons, aunt and niece (as indeed the gentleman was).

The method is eclectic; the goal, to make use for each poem of the best available translation. The results, as were no doubt foreseen, are uneven and unequal. Some of the translations in the Mathews book are perhaps better than the best of Conder's, yet the latter's effort has a unity of style and tone which the Mathews anthology of translations necessarily lacks. There are a number of good poems of unquestionably Baudelairean inspiration. But no more than the lone Conder is the Mathews translation-brigade able to achieve the impossible: to give us Baudelaire or any real equivalent of Baudelaire.

One or two examples should make clear what I mean. The opening lines of *Le Voyage* are well known:

Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes,  
L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit.



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Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!  
Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit!

Aggeler renders them:

To a child who is fond of maps and engravings  
The universe is the size of his immense hunger.  
Ah! how vast is the world in the light of a lamp!  
In memory's eyes how small the world is!

That may sound flat and banal, but it gives us an acceptable paraphrase of the literal meaning. For the reader who wants the poetry as well, let him learn French!

What does Conder offer him?

The young love maps and prints, and the earth's size  
Is equal to their boundless appetite.  
How vast the world is by the study light!  
How shrunken is the world in memory's eyes!

Is this bouncing rhythm really Baudelairean? "The young love" is initially rather confusing and jarring: it suggests something else. Are "l'univers" and "the earth" identical? "The study" and "shrunken" might be inferred from, but they are *in*, the text?

But how does Roy Campbell, the Mathews translator, render the stanza? Like this:

For children crazed with maps and prints and stamps—  
The universe can sate their appetite.  
How vast the world is by the light of lamps,  
But in the eyes of memory how slight!

For Baudelaire's solitary child Campbell, like Conder, substitutes a kindergarten. The translation of "amoureux" by "crazed" seems better suited to the tone of the *Orlando Furioso* than that of the *Fleurs du Mal*. Where Baudelaire uses two words, "cartes" and "estampes," Campbell uses three. Is "can sate their appetite" an acceptable equivalent for "est égal à son vaste appétit"? Is "slight" necessarily the same thing as "petit"? How much in common have the rhythms of Campbell's lines with those of Baudelaire? And what have all three translators succeeded in making of, and with what force have they rendered, that important and characteristically Baudelairean term, *clarté*?

Or consider the very well known refrain from *L'Invitation au Voyage*:

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,  
Luxe, calme et volupté.

Conder proposes:

There all is order, beauty, ease,  
Pleasure, luxury and peace.

Six terms for Baudelaire's five. And the shift in position: have we lost nothing by it?

The Mathews translator, Richard Wilbur, offers us:

There, there is nothing else but grace and measure,  
Richness, quietness and pleasure.

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The infelicity of "there, there" is obvious. "Order" no longer stands first: it has shrunk to "measure"; "beauty" has dwindled to "grace." What we get is hardly what Baudelaire gave us.

Aggeler, attempting less, achieves, I think, more:

There all is order and beauty,  
Luxury, peace, and pleasure.

But the *charm* of which Valéry speaks still eludes us.

These deceptively "easy" lines had already overtaxed the poetic resources of previous translators. Commenting in 1928 upon Arthur Symon's rendering of them:

There all is beauty, ardency,  
Passion, rest and luxury,

T. S. Eliot had noted that:

The only one of these words that is right is "beauty." Baudelaire did not, we may be sure, take these substantives at random, nor did he arrange them at random. It is not for nothing that he put *ordre* first; and if Mr. Symons had understood *notre* Baudelaire he would not have substituted—"ardency"! But order is positive, chaos is a defect, and we imagine that Mr. Symons was not trying to *avoid* Order—he simply did not recognize it. We can see that Mr. Symons, trained in the verbal school of Swinburne, is anxious to get a nice sounding phrase; and we may infer that he found in Baudelaire a nice sounding phrase. But Baudelaire was not a disciple of Swinburne: for Baudelaire every word counts.

So much, for Baudelaire, does every word count that, in *Incidences* (1921), André Gide claimed to see in these two lines the perfect definition of the work of art. Not one of them, he says, is superfluous, and each of them is in exactly the right place. He would be willing to take them as titles for successive chapters of a treatise on aesthetics:

1. *Ordre* (Logique, disposition raisonnable des parties).
2. *Beauté* (Ligne, élan, profil de l'œuvre).
3. *Luxe* (Abondance disciplinée).
4. *Calme* (Tranquillisation du tumulte).
5. *Volupté* (Sensualité, charme adorable de la matière, attrait).

It would, of course, be easy to compile from these three volumes a fairly long list of mistranslations, verbal infelicities and worse: to do so would be neither just nor rewarding. The present translators have, like their forerunners, simply not succeeded in an impossible task. The effort will no doubt be very often repeated, both because such exercises are useful to practicing poets and to people whose interest in poetry is more than casual and because most writers are tempted at one time or another by the bright lure of the unattainable. But the reader whose knowledge of the *Fleurs du Mal* is limited to what he is able to glean from translations will be puzzled by the magnitude of Baudelaire's reputation. One of the brightest stars in the firmament of relatively recent poetry? If the *Fleurs du Mal* were *only* what as Englished they seem to be—how odd!

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JOHN H. MEYER



# Book Reviews

## Merton Indexed

*Thomas Merton: A Bibliography.* By Frank Dell'Isola. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. \$3.50.

IT IS rare not only that an author with as brief a professional writing span as the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, should have written some twenty-one or more books, but that these together with various incidental writings and translations, and reviews and criticisms of his work, should be the subject of an extensive bibliography, and this in his own lifetime. Yet such is the case, as evidenced by Dell'Isola's meticulously structured work, which first appeared in the Winter 1954-1955 issue of *Thought*, and was later expanded and brought up to date in the present volume. It is definitive as reference on the writings of Thomas Merton. A professional bibliographical work, its style of listing is similar to that used on the printed cards of the American Library Association, with the exception that it also lists blank and unnumbered printed preliminary leaves, pages on which any printing appears, and end-papers, in order that the priority of First Editions be indisputably established. However, with the exception of two bibliographically significant English entries, *The Waters of Siloe* and *Selected Poems*, only American First Editions are described in detail. All arrangements are chronological.

The book is divided into nine sections of indexes, arranged not alphabetically, but as follows: A) "Books and Pamphlets by Thomas Merton"; B) "Books with Contributions by Thomas Merton"; C) "Contributions by Thomas Merton to Newspapers and Periodicals"; D) "Critical Articles and Letters About Thomas Merton in Periodicals, Newspapers and Books"; E) "Translations by Thomas Merton"; F) "Miscellanea"; G) "The Poetry of Thomas Merton in Periodicals, Newspapers and Books"; H) "Translations into Foreign Languages of Books, Poems and Essays by Thomas Merton"; I) "The Unpublished Works of Thomas Merton"; J) "Juvenilia"; and "Indexes." The editor contributes an "Introductory Note" and "Addenda."

Section A contains a detailed description of each of Merton's twenty-one published volumes—even to calling attention to an error in the Latin text of the dedication of *Thirty Poems*, in which two words, without Merton's knowledge, were moved to the beginning of the dedication. The corrected sentence should read: "Reginæ Poetarum, Sanctissimæ Dei Genitrici/Ac Semper Virgini Mariae." Also noted in this listing of the first section are the reprint and paper-back editions of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *Seeds of Contemplation*, and *The Sign of Jonas*; in separate listing are the special edition of 100 signed copies in brown-slip case of *Seeds of Contemplation*, and the reprint edition of *The Waters of Siloe*, with notations on the variations of text.

In Section B are listed books both foreign and domestic containing contributions by Thomas Merton. There are twenty-two items in all, including introductions, prefaces and forewords, chapters in books, comments, and published excerpts from various of his writings. Likewise noted here are two illustrations—of St. John of the Cross, and of St. Thérèse of Lisieux—which appear in Clare Boothe Luce's *Saints for Now*. The section concludes with a description of *In Silentio*, the introduction which Merton wrote for the French volume, *Silence*.

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*dans le Ciel*, a book of ninety photographs of the monastic life edited by the French Benedictines of L'Abbaye de La Pierre-Qui-Vire. Both text and photographs of this book have recently appeared both in England and America, under title of *Silence in Heaven*.

Section C notes contributions made by Thomas Merton to various newspapers and periodicals, foreign and domestic. Of special interest here are the listings of his early book reviews in the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald-Tribune*, written before he entered the monastery. The type and genre of book sent him for review are noteworthy; as for example, John Crowe Ransom's *The World's Body*, John Cowper Powys' *Enjoyment of Literature*, E. M. W. Tillyard's *The Personal Heresy*, and William York Tindall's *D. H. Lawrence and Susan His Cow*, to mention a few. Also in his pre-monastic writing is an article in *The Catholic World*, called "Huxley's Pantheon," written at St. Bonaventure's. His later writings as a monk in Gethsemani include book reviews and articles for such magazines as *The Commonweal*, *Integrity*, *Cross and Crown*, and *Worship*. There are also numerous reprints from *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *Seeds of Contemplation*, and *The Sign of Jonas* in such publications as *The New York Post* and *This Week Magazine*, and such foreign titles as *La Vie Spirituelle* and *The Month*. In this section Dell'Isola also notes off-prints of a series of articles on "The Transforming Union in St. Bernard and St. John of the Cross," which appeared in successive issues of *Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorum*, an international Cistercian publication. He lists too the four excerpts of unpublished material from the original manuscript of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, one of which appeared in *Renaissance* and three in *The Catholic World*.

Section D lists the critical articles and letters about Thomas Merton published in periodicals, newspapers, and books, foreign and domestic. This is a particularly fascinating section as we find in it the reviews of his first books, along with the listings of the essay-review of *Elected Silence* (English edition of *The Seven Storey Mountain*) and the heated exchange of correspondence that ran in six issues of *The Statesman and Nation*, in a critical skirmish between V. S. Pritchett, who wrote the review, and Evelyn Waugh, editor of the book. Later they were joined in the fray by R. van Eck and Harry Binns.

Section E lists three translations from the French made by Merton in his first years at the monastery: *The Kingdom of Jesus*, by a Trappist Father, with Introduction by Fulton Sheen; *The Soul of the Apostolate*, by Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard; and *The Spirit of Simplicity: An Official Report of the Cistercian Order*, together with texts from St. Bernard of Clairvaux. To this latter volume Merton furnishes a commentary as well as a translation. None of the three volumes mentions Merton as the translator.

Section F, under title of "Miscellanea, Special Foreign Editions, Recordings," has three items: an English de luxe edition of *The Waters of Silence* (first English version of *The Waters of Siloe*); the first English edition of *Selected Poems of Thomas Merton*, with foreword by Robert Speaight; and two recordings: the first, one of the *Harvard Vocarium Records*, a reading of three poems of Merton's by Robert Speaight; and the second, a *Columbia Masterworks* record of plain chant, with program notes by Thomas Merton. In a footnote Dell'Isola calls attention to the fact that when this record was issued it was erroneously believed (and still is, by many) that the running commentary accompanying the chant



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was the voice of Thomas Merton, an error due to an ambiguity of wording on the record's slip-cover. The voice is that of another monk of Gethsemani abbey.

Section G lists chronologically the periodicals, newspapers, and books in which the poetry of Thomas Merton has appeared. Heading the list is his "Fable for a War," which in June, 1939, written while he was a graduate student of the Faculty of Philosophy at Columbia University, won for him the annual Mariana Griswold van Rensselaer prize for the best example of English lyric verse. It is also interesting to note that many of Merton's early poems appeared in such magazines as *The Experimental Review* (defunct), *View*, *The New Yorker*, *The Quarterly Review of Literature*, *Chimera* (defunct), *The Tiger's Eye* (defunct), *The Sewanee Review*, *The Hudson Review*, and the *Partisan Review*. *The Commonwealth* and the *Atlantic Monthly* have published most of his recent poetry.

Section H lists alphabetically by language, and chronologically by title, the translations into foreign languages of Merton's books, poems, and essays. Dell' Isola remarks of this section that he has as well, and advisedly, listed the Merton publications which have appeared in England and Ireland. This group of translations is astounding. We find eleven of his books translated into Italian, nine into French, nine into Spanish, eight into German, six into Dutch, three into Portuguese, three into Danish, and one into Swedish. In the "Addenda" concluding his introduction to the bibliography, Dell'Isola mentions three other items which have come to his attention at this writing: a German edition of *What is Contemplation?*, a Spanish translation (Buenos Aires) of *No Man is an Island*, and a set of two conferences on the priestly life, "Il Sacerdote in Unione Con Maria Immacolata," which has been published in *Convivium*, a new Italian periodical brought out in Rome by the Priest's Society for the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. A cross-check of the items in the lists of translations shows that *The Seven Storey Mountain* has been translated into all the languages above mentioned, except the Swedish (England and Ireland have published their own edition of *Elected Silence*); *Seeds of Contemplation*, in all above-named languages; *The Sign of Jonas*, in all except the Dutch and Swedish, to name but three of the most popular books. But one must see for oneself the astonishing list to realize how swiftly the works of Thomas Merton have gained readers in many countries of Europe and of South America. A book published as recently as 1955, *No Man is an Island*, has already appeared in French and German translations.

In Section I are certain unpublished works of Thomas Merton. In a note to this part, the bibliographer calls attention to the martyrology of the Cistercian saints written by Merton while he was yet a seminarian (1943-44), which was never published but stands in mimeographed form. He also lists, in detail, the seven series of *Orientation Notes* written from 1950 to 1954, when Merton was Master of Scholastics at Gethsemani Abbey. These syllabuses have been mimeographed in seven volumes for the exclusive use of the seminarians. The *Cistercian Studies* and the separate volumes of *Monastic Orientation* are listed in this section together with several other special items, including *Notes on Sacred Art*, which appeared in the November 1956 issue of *Jubilee*; a prayer-card; a portrait of St. Catherine of Siena for the book jacket of Sigrid Undset's *Katherina Benincasa*, published in Germany in 1953; and a post-card bearing the official hymn of the XXXVI International Eucharistic Congress, This hymn, a poem in seven four-line stanzas by D. Marcos Barbosa, O.S.B., was translated into English by Thomas Merton, and printed in Brazil.

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The final section, J, lists "Juvenilia," contributions of the young Merton to various school publications during his prep school and college days. Fifty-two items are noted, ranging in date from December 1931 to April 1940. The first four listings appear in *The Oakhamian* magazine of the prep school Merton attended in Rutland (England). Numbers 5 and 6, "Paris in Chicago," and "A Crust for Egoists," appeared in *The Granta*, Cambridge University, 1933-1934. In November of 1934 there is a letter to *Esquire*. Items 8 to 52 (with the exception of J-25) all appeared in Columbia University publications: *The Columbia Jester*, *The Columbia Review*, and *The Columbia Spectator*. The only cartoon mentioned is that labeled "unfortunate" which accompanied his first entry in the *Oakhamian*. There is no mention made here of Merton's editorship of the *Columbia Yearbook* of 1937.

Nine indexes follow, one for each section of the bibliography, with respective items listed according to letter of section and number of item. In the index of articles about Merton, authors' names are listed.

For the indefatigable labor and meticulous research and cross-checking of material that have gone into this work, not only contemporary but all future Christian scholars must be grateful. It is to be hoped that the Merton writings in manuscript, whether published or unpublished, will before long receive a like careful listing. For the present bibliography, as Dell'Isola notes in his introduction, they were not especially pertinent. This bibliography is without a doubt the definitive work on the writings of Thomas Merton, and anyone even remotely interested in the Trappist monk's writings will want by all means to peruse if not possess it. Without it, the reference section of no library can be complete.

SISTER M. THERESE, S.D.S.

## Small Music

*Chemin des Fumées*. By Renée Rivet: Seghers.

IN 1952 a small and peculiar book of poems, *Nos Ombres Qui Cherchent*, was published by a young woman, Renée Rivet. Greeted favorably by critics like Gaston Bachelard, the book, though containing few finished poems, displayed a considerable talent. In 1956 this talent was realized; *Chemin des Fumées*, which won the Louise Labé prize (one of France's most distinguished poetry awards), contains a number of good poems, some of them ranking with the best of contemporary production.

Mlle. Rivet is often too sentimental for my taste, especially when describing directly subjective states—sorrow, faith, wonder, love. However there are many good poets, Verlaine for example, who often wax sentimental on these subjects. And when Mlle. Rivet is good, she is almost as good as the better Verlaine; she has that same music in poems that are glowing and concise as a pearl necklace. She is best as a painter, when the emotion drifts to us through the image of a cat, a guitar, a tenement in the moonlight. In some of her rare religious poems appears a childlike moving directness, for example, "Flesh bathed, like an April leaf."

Here is one of her typical poems:

Un chat sur un toit  
Grignote la lune



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Et son ombre ondule  
Aux cordes du vent

Toutes les fenêtres  
Tous les yeux sans tête  
Dansent avec lui  
La ville chavire  
Comme un grand navire  
Chavire sans bruit

Ville de papier  
Ombres découpées  
Ficelles légères

Un chat qui s'étire  
Tout autour du monde  
Du monde qui roule  
Boule de fourrure  
Qui roule sans bruit  
Au fond du sommeil.

The poem moves like an arrow from the cat nibbling and creeping under the moon as the lighted windows, compared to eyes without heads, move with it. In the lunar haze the city capsizes, silently. It is a city of paper. The cat stretches itself out around the world—that fury ball that rolls, without a sound, to the end of sleep.

Some might feel that, despite the poem's evident music, its spooky charm is a mere novelty. However the music is so well adapted to the emotion that there is here the true wedding of matter and form called art. For example, in lines seven to ten, the cluster of rimes gives us the exact music of something capsizing in silence. Of course this is not the poetry of a great writer thinking great thoughts and letting you know that he *is* thinking them—Hugo, Whitman, or Claudel. It is the song of a very tiny person, very scared, who is hemmed in by the world she loves—a proud and hurt child, if you will, who in a small but genuine way has grasped a bit of the world's tragedy, and has seen how the fleeting second is often a secret gem of God.

HERBERT LUST

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### "The Man of Many Turns"

*The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero.* By W. B. Stanford. Macmillan. \$6.00.

POSSESSING two thousand years of continuous life in the stream of Western literature and art, exerting everywhere a profound imaginative force, wherever met giving a figure richly ambiguous in character yet always "the man of many turns," in every land and age being freshly reconceived by a Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Tennyson, d'Annunzio, Joyce—this is the Ulysses theme that is now offered us in a brilliant study by Professor Stanford of Trinity College, Dublin.

After a suggestive introductory chapter on "the adaptability of mythical figures" that touches upon such problems as the causes of variation in the classical types, Stanford's study offers first a synoptic view of Ulysses as an

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epic hero. Separate chapters in this first part treat with magisterial control of scholarship, and much originality and perception, these problems and facets: Ulysses as the grandson of Autolycus (the inherited wiliness of Ulysses), as the favorite of Athene (for in the mutual relationship of Ulysses and Athene may be seen the prefiguration of later Athenian culture), in his personal relationships (though a lonely figure in the *Iliad*, Ulysses' "civilized gentleness, his intuitive intelligence, and his firm self-possession" are developed in his intimate personal relationships with Circe and Calypso, Nausicaa and Penelope, and those qualities possessed so richly by Ulysses are seen as unique in that warrior-age). The last two chapters in this part further isolate and develop the complexity of Ulysses, as a figure not freakish but differentiated in many significant ways and altogether well integrated. Stanford also discusses those post-Homeric poems called the Epic Cycle which raise many problems. Once the African Greek, Eugammon of Cyrene, in the sixth century B.C., wrote his *Telegony* as a sequel to the *Odyssey*, the door was opened to the rapidly multiplying inventions of later periods. But, as Stanford notes in his concluding paragraph to this chapter and section,

. . . the high adventurousness of the *Odyssey* and the passionate heroics of the *Iliad* had degenerated into pedigrees and old wives' tales of adulteries and parricides. Yet this prolixity and confusion of legends about the final fate of Odysseus, together with the absence of any definite statement by Homer, was a source of notable developments in the vernacular tradition. By it Dante, Tennyson, Pascoli, Kazantzakis, and others, were given license to use their imagination freely in devising the apitest end for the man of many turns; and they used their opportunity superbly. But it can hardly be too much emphasized that figures like Dante's doomed seeker after forbidden knowledge and Tennyson's Byronic victim of wanderlust are fundamentally different from Homer's Odysseus. They are outward bound, centrifugal, while in the *Odyssey* the force of Odysseus's heart and mind is essentially homeward bound, centripetal, towards Ithaca and Penelope.

Uncertain though much of Stanford's scholarly voyage has necessarily been to this point, there were more guides and charts available to him here than for the more perilous voyage through the medieval and modern periods. Despite scattered studies, until now no one has tried to trace the continuous development of the theme from ancient to modern times. But Stanford provides us with a sound guide through the intricate shoals and reefs of Athenian disfavor, of Roman contradiction between Horatian "presentation of Ulysses as a noble exemplar of virtuous living" and the Virgilian condemnation of him (through Sinon) as "treacherous, cruel, and criminal," and lastly the tribute of Ovid for Ulysses's verbal skill and the ambivalent stylization of Statius and Seneca.

Since one must know the direction of the developing theme when one encounters a representation of Ulysses, modern readers will be grateful for so competent a survey. To quote from Stanford's summarizing statement of the main lines of development:

The end of the Graeco-Roman period had left Ulysses's reputation at a low ebb in Western Europe. The combined influence of the pro-Roman



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and the anti-Homeric writers had established a generally accepted conception of him as an unscrupulous, treacherous, contemptible intriguer. Some philosophers, it is true, had continued to praise him as an example of prudent and virtuous living; and this attitude had lived on in the writings and teachings of the Christian Church. But after Benoit de Sainte Maure's *Roman de Troie* (written about 1160) had become popular, the anti-Ulyssian faction dominated the main literary tradition for the best part of three centuries. Gradually, however, in the later part of that period, the revival of interest in Greek studies removed the accumulated load of Latin and Frankish odium from Ulysses. . . . [Two champions of Ulysses's good qualities were Plutarch and Petrarch.] . . . The whole atmosphere of the Renaissance with its optimistic humanism, its richness, variety, and adventurousness, was naturally congenial to a figure so versatile as Ulysses. The medieval dichotomy between the warrior-knight and the learned clerk, both in education and in life, had made it hard to comprehend his double nature. But the men of the Renaissance, with their equal interests in the martial and the liberal arts, could appreciate him fully.

The remainder of *The Ulysses Theme*, "Modern Variations on the Classical Themes," is divided into three surveys; "The Man of Policies," "The Wanderer" and "The Re-integrated Hero." In Benoit's twelfth-century *Roman de Troie*, Stanford writes, the modern career of Ulysses the politician begins and "in it for the first time in a major literary work Ulysses stands before us speaking a vernacular language, wearing the armor of a medieval knight, and . . . acquiring some of the psychological traits of a Western European." This presentation furnished the model for three centuries: Guido delle Colonne and Lydgate and above all Shakespeare. Standing above the smoking ruins of Troy's social and political order in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, above a devastation brought about by pride and lust, insubordination and treachery, stood one man. "In that legend there was only one character who presented some hope for the maintenance of hierarchical order and decency: a man disillusioned but not embittered, self-controlled but not hardened, disciplined but not ruthless, public-spirited but not inhumane, wily but not fundamentally dishonest, firm but not ungentle—Ulysses." Giraudoux's Ulysses belongs in this tradition: as in the Greek *Iliad* and the Renaissance *Troilus and Cressida*, the modern Ulysses of Giraudoux's *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* "stands for the civilized mind in a world of undisciplined passion. This is his highest function as a *politique*." Much more might have been said about the contemporaneity of these problems for Shakespeare and Giraudoux—about the fine tensioning of universal and particular in both—for this is germane to a fuller discussion of the Ulysses theme and its ecology, its relationships with each cultural age that represents it.

Ulysses the wanderer, if not the dominant, is certainly the most familiar emphasis in our modern view of this European hero, and "Dante's vision of total destruction for this Ulysses and his companions" has now in turn become classic:

In place of this centripetal, homeward-bound figure [of Homer's *Odyssey* and of du Bellay] Dante substituted a personification of centrifugal

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force. By doing so he made Ulysses symbolize the anarchic element in those conflicts between orthodoxy and heresy, conservatism and progressivism, classicism and romanticism, which vexed his own time and were to vex later epochs more tragically. When he condemned this Ulysses he condemned what he thought to be a destructive force in society. . . .

And the end of the road of such centrifugal force in heroes is d'Annunzio's gospel of aggressive, self-centered heroism, Stanford contends; and Dante's judgment that such a road leads to disaster would seem to have been confirmed by recent history. Others too have had this vision of Ulysses and so developed the Ulysses theme: Tennyson, Pascoli, most recently the Swedish novelist Johnson, and a host of lesser poets and novelists who have dressed him in the finery of their neon fancy.

All of the portraits of Ulysses after Homer have been incomplete, Stanford argues, until the massive synthetic structures of Joyce and Kazantzakis gave us once again what he calls "the re-integrated hero." This critical study of Joyce's *Ulysses* is a valuable contribution toward our deeper understanding of the place of the novel in our culture, and through a sharpening of our perspective view of Joyce's exploitation of the theme we move toward a more informed judgment of the structure of the novel. The study of Katantzakis' novel does English-speaking readers a much-needed service in introducing this great work in modern Greek.

I have spent some time in summarizing the main lines of development of the Ulysses theme; it is of course a tribute to the penetration of Stanford's work and to the clarity of its presentation that we can now see those lines of force at work and trace them out with certitude and understanding. But there are larger questions which this magisterial compass leads us to ask: the still important and yet to be surveyed relationship of classical and vernacular influences through the medieval and renaissance transformations, deeper aspects of the hero (for in *Ulysses* we have one of the oldest heroes and one of the most metamorphic) than have been projected in most unilinear studies and especially the problem (as Eliot put it) of the individual talent and tradition. Here certainly in our conspectus of the Ulysses theme we find a prime exemplar to illustrate Eliot's dictum that "what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it."

We might well end then by echoing Eliot: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone." No, nor his work. For no work of art ever existed in a vacuum that contained only itself and its laboratory critic: there is always the cultural earth from which the art-plant sprang, in which one finds its roots, and there is the onlooker, the play's audience, the other person in the room for whom the poem was written and who completes its meaning, the listening ear, the sympathetic eye. When a work of art belongs to a tradition like the Ulysses theme, then it must be set in place within that tradition; we must insist that such a work cannot be fully understood, cannot therefore be fully valued, alone. This necessarily adds the burden of another responsibility to the many which the poet already carries, but with each responsibility comes a privilege or special freedom. With this responsibility, awareness of the





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stream of past tradition that has carried the theme to him, there comes the liberation of the timelessness of all that is past through the surrender of that tradition to the urgency of the present moment. To attempt to make that urgency actual in his living moment is to run a great risk, to gamble much—what is at risk is the current value of a great theme, as well as all that a poet himself has at stake—but it is a risk which the poet who has a sense of tradition must, like Ulysses, always be ready to take.

University of Notre Dame

R. J. SCHOECK

### Literary Guidebook

*Présences contemporaines*. By Pierre Brodin. 2v. Paris: Debresse.

THE demand for a second edition of Pierre Brodin's first volume so soon after the appearance of its first version testifies clearly to the success of the book. But, in fact, one could hardly fail to anticipate that the mere presentation of twenty-nine writers occupying positions of prime importance on the contemporary scene would make this offering a valuable contribution, if only because a chronologically arranged bibliography allows one to see in a glance what such authors as Anouilh, Camus, Cocteau, Green, Montherlant, et al have done since their first titles. Of course, it is inevitable that what is gained in breadth is lost in depth to some extent, and one might feel inclined to complain that the measure of Georges Bernanos can hardly be taken in two dozen pages or that François Mauriac's authorship is too extensive to be described and evaluated within similar limits. But such a criticism would be unjust and would not take into account Brodin's clear explanation in his preface that his collection of essays is more in the nature of a record of the writers' activities than a criticism: "the critic, in the greatest number of cases, had to yield to the historian" in spite of the essayist's personal preferences and convictions. He has no intention of demonstrating the "superiority" of Michaux or Char, of Anouilh or Salacrou, of Mauriac or Sartre. His *Présences contemporaines* grew out of his professional efforts to inform and guide North American students who felt themselves possessed of the desire to gain a more substantial knowledge of significant contemporary authors; he wished to aid those seeking a more complete picture of writers known widely but superficially as a result of an occasional translation, Broadway play, or movie. In a word, Brodin aims at a presentation of the facts. He fulfills his purpose with as much success as could be desired within the limits of reason and within fewer than 500 pages.

In the second volume, of nearly the same length, the method followed in the first volume still obtains. There is no pretence of saying "the last word" on each or any of the eighteen writers presented; in fact, it is stated prefatorily that the essayist hopes once more that his work will impel some of his readers "to penetrate further into these more or less new worlds" for which he has done no more than "furnish the map and describe the principal features."

All the authors presented were born in the last third of the nineteenth century and had reached major stature by World War I. There are, consequently, compact bio-bibliographies for Proust, Gide, and Maurois, all of whom scarcely need an introduction to English readers above the student level. But it is a mighty convenience for which to be grateful, to have all the important



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data on this trio in such handy form. Also, many readers of *Renaissance* will be interested especially in the compact sections on Péguy and Claudel. They provide a valuable point of orientation for those seeking an overall view. The volume closes with a list of books and articles devoted to the situation as a whole in literary France and to each of the authors presented.

For students and teachers of literature, let it be said again, here is an impressive amount of valuable information made readily accessible; for those who are desirous of extending the boundaries of their reading, here is a well ordered and compact guide to the best that creative French authors have given to the public during the last fifty years.

SPIRE PITOU

### A Harvest of Poets

*The Second America Book of Verse: 1930-1955.* Edited by James Edward Tobin. The America Press. \$3.00.

A PROPOS of those who object to all anthologies on principle, W. H. Auden once remarked that they are mistaken, since what is really wrong with most anthologies "is that their compilers have not taken their occupation seriously enough, or thought precisely about its basic principles." He then enumerates the possible principles of selection as aesthetic value plus aesthetic character, caprice or chance (which is itself an aesthetic category), and subject-matter, which must be a real category of experience for the average human being—"bee-keeping is a real category only for bee-keepers; Love, War, Death are categories for all men."

In compiling this anthology, James Tobin, though circumscribed by a time period—the poems must have appeared in *America* between the years 1930 and 1955—strives not only to be aware of these categories in his selection, but while striving to keep well within the first, namely, that of aesthetic value—we shall not accuse him of the second, caprice or chance—he has set himself firmly in stricture of the third, that of subject-matter, having made ten divisions to suit the further exigencies of his purpose. These are: "Creation and Redemption," "Mary," "Life and Death," "Nature," "Possessions and Outlooks," "Love," "Satire and Wit," "Translations," "Saints and Others," and "Prayer."

Be it said at once that *America* cannot be accused of publishing an anthology of poetry every two or three years in order to push new names, or big names which they have either kept with them or have "caught" in the interim. *The First America Book of Verse* appeared in 1928, under the auspices of Francis X. Talbot, S.J., who, beside being literary editor of *America* for many years, was the actual founder of the Catholic Poetry Society of America, a fact that his extreme modesty has allowed to be little known. The present literary editor, Harold Gardiner, S.J., a discriminating critic and author, in his introduction to this second collection, points up the differences between the poems in this and in the first anthology. Departures are mainly, he says, in matters of technique and diction. Poets who write in the modern genre are distinguished by a greater freedom of structure and a bolder experimentation, with a supreme disregard of the older "language of 'poesy.'" These changes, he continues, are due to the deepening maturity of Catholic education, not only formal, but especially that which results from "a participation in the life of the Church through the liturgy and an



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increasing awareness of doctrines like that of the mystical body." The validity of this statement is exemplified in the best of the poems in this book.

Statistically, there are 198 poems in the volume (not counting the three distinct poems which make up the one by J. G. E. Hopkins titled *Variations on a Theme*) by 139 poets, not listing the translators (though each translation is excellently done, and two or three superbly, in the manner of a new creation). The number of poems representing each writer ranges from one to seven, in such fashion that one cannot but surmise that if any one of the poets represented by five, six, or seven poems had made other appearances in the magazine during the indicated period, these poems would undoubtedly have been included as well, though in no one of these cases do the respective poems represent the best of that poet's work. In the cases of Jessica Powers (seven poems), and Sister Madeleva (five poems), this lack of selectivity is especially unfortunate, since both have placed their best work not in *America*, nor in *Spirit*, but in *The Commonwealth* and one or other secular literary magazines. Also, the six poems by which Eileen Duggan, a sterling poet, is represented are all of her earlier work. Still one is very pleased to find the poetry of our younger poets such as Frederick Nims, Leonard McCarthy, S.J., Thomas P. McDonnell, Henry Rago, and Raymond Roseliep, whose names we frequently come upon in various other magazines. Poets of perennial stature, such as Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy, Padraic Colum, even Sappho and Horace, are represented in adequate translations; and we bow to Gerard Manley Hopkins' rendering into English of the "Jesu Dulcis Memoria," in the manner of his first period, and to Sophocles, in a translation of a chorus from *Oedipus Rex*. These translations are admirably in place and beautifully executed.

However, we need constantly to remind ourselves of the fact that representation of the aesthetic achievement of the respective poets is not secured by number of inclusions. One ought not unduly to blame the editor for the only too present temptation of all anthologists, namely, name-catering. That compiler is happy indeed who can succeed in maintaining the ideal degree of detachment and objectivity in making his selections. One cannot help but feel, however, that certain poems, slight in poetic value if possessing any at all, have been included merely on the prestige of their authors. Blindfolded to names, the editor could have improved his collection greatly by pruning away some fifty poems of lesser poetic value. But I am sure that name-catering was among the least pressures of which Tobin was aware in compiling this fine anthology.

In general one might remark that among the nuns represented—and there are twenty of them—a number are such who have written poetry at one time, or sparsely, and have long since given up, if not the writing, at least its publishing. This however, is certainly not true of Sisters Jeremy, Maura, Irma, and Ada, whose work continues to appear wherever good poetry is printed. And any disagreement with certain inclusions is more than made up for by the poems here by some of our new and wonderfully gifted writers, such as John Fandel, Thomas P. McDonnell, and Raymond Roscliep; and Edwin Kennebeck's "And the Leaves Moved," is on a par of excellence with the best in the book, wherein

... All man's tears shed for man are vain.  
Thus hit and hurt, this hiding thing was still  
and prayed.

And heard the leaves move on the hill.

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Poems that are a sheer delight stand out in each section of the book. Earl Daniel's "Gloss on a Midwinter Journey," posits a peak of excellence in the first part entitled "Creation and Redemption," where

The Magi wear gold crowns, embroidered garments weigh  
down scholar shoulders,  
Falling to slippers feet in tapestried foldings, . . .  
And the oxen kneel too.  
This, my friends, is the only valid one-world  
Which is so much talked about.  
This is the one valid society,  
The humble heart being the one valid mark of distinction.

Leonard McCarthy's "Lent" is another, where

. . . as the children walk in languid wonder,  
To Stations, playing marbles as they go,  
Or jumping the boxwood hedges over and over—  
O see the cross of Christ begins to show.

Sister Maura's wonderful "We Walk in Miracles," with its daisy theme, and the medieval flavor of Sister Madeleva's exquisite "Wardrobe" are also here, with the late Alfred Barrett's "Dedication," as fine as any in its compression and stark human validity. Of the "Mary" poems in section two, "Mary Compared to a Mother Bird," is perhaps most original in handling of theme, and excellent in the craftsmanship of the sonnet. It is a delight to find here two of the outstanding Marian poems that drew prizes in *America's* contest of Marian poetry some years ago: Sister Mary St. Virginia's "A Nun to Mary Virgin" and Father John L. Bonn's "Madonna." And it is good to see again Father Feeney's poignant "Virgin Most Prudent."

Raymond Roscliep's exquisite "Indian Summer," which initiates the section titled "Life and Death"; Jessica Powers' "Loveliest Blossom," in "Nature"; Sister Maris Stella's delightfully rhythmic "Here Only A Dove," and Sister Irma's "English I-B" in "Possessions and Outlooks"; John Fandel's "Little Fable," in "Satire and Wit"; and Sister David's translation of Claudel's "The Child Jesus of Prague" are poems one would not wish to miss. Were it not, however, for Frederick Nims's strong "Dedication," and Henry Rago's "Marriage," the section titled "Love," could scarcely be justified, so small is the relevance of the poems to such profound subject matter. Why is Frances Frost's "Gray Afternoon" in this section at all?

Sister M. Jeremy's "Conversations of Père Lamy," in strong-fibred blank verse, towers in the division "Saints and Others," where in the familiar converse of the old Curé with Our Lady, she teasingly finds fault with him in matters artistic:

. . . And then that frightful statuel  
You thought to honor me by painting it—  
The yellow sash! You made me very ugly!  
She laughed with all her heart. "But still I liked it."  
. . . Her gaze returned  
And rested on his surplice—"Now that lace . . ."  
She touched it. "Imitation, as I thought."  
That did not bother him; somehow he felt  
Comforted.



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Sister Irma's "Song about Sichar," stands easily beside it, though strikingly different in its quiet drama and direct implications:

*Give to a Jew?  
Oh well, why not?  
Something new,  
And the sun is hot. . . .  
She let down her bucket into the well,  
She laid her heart on the sunny stone,  
And drew up truth as clear as a bell  
And a kindled heart that sang and shone.*

There is too a skillful ballade by Margaret Devereux—and few, even skilled poets, can write them well—called "The Chester-Belloc"; and Sister Ada's inimitable "Limbo" with the quiet truth of its unforgettable close which, once read, one never forgets.

In the last division of the book, "Prayer," Nims's sonnet, "Night Prayer" addressed to the

*Intimate God whose two hands at my breast  
Cowl the heart, curve rib, keep shoulder steady,  
And respiration like that by lifeguards pressed  
On the half-drowned hold near, each moment ready. . . .*

is wonderfully moving and strong. Its glorious sestet proves again that even the strict forms can hold our modern utterance:

*Who cupped in skull the rich pomegranate brain  
Each cell with built-in ship, cornice, or ocean,  
Or man (men within men), tunnel or train,  
And then set all that double world in motion —  
This twin of water and fire hold while we sleep,  
More scattering far than stars, harder to keep.*

Also, Thomas McDonnell's "Bonfire" blazes rightfully here, but why his "Lament for Moderns," appears in this section I cannot say.

To remark of a book of poems or of an anthology that it is uneven is a commonplace. Sometimes such a volume can scarcely be otherwise, especially if the writing covers any span of years. But the individual poems in this *Second America Book of Verse* are for the most part smooth and uplifting, some of them marvelously expert. It is a book that one can always take up with pleasure and delight.

SISTER M. THERESE, S.D.S.

### Clearing the Air

*The New Apologists for Poetry.* By Murray Krieger. University of Minnesota Press. \$4.00.

IN THE preface to this acute and painstaking study, Krieger, Associate Professor of English at the University of Minnesota, says: "I entered upon this study with what now appears to me to have been a shocking confidence that I could eventually come by the solutions to the theoretical problems I intended to pose . . . As my knowledge of the problems deepened, I increasingly

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sensed my own incapacities ever to subdue them utterly. But if I was more realistic about my own powers, I remained as confident about the revelatory powers of systematic aesthetics." This is a commendable humility, which augurs well for the author's future work.

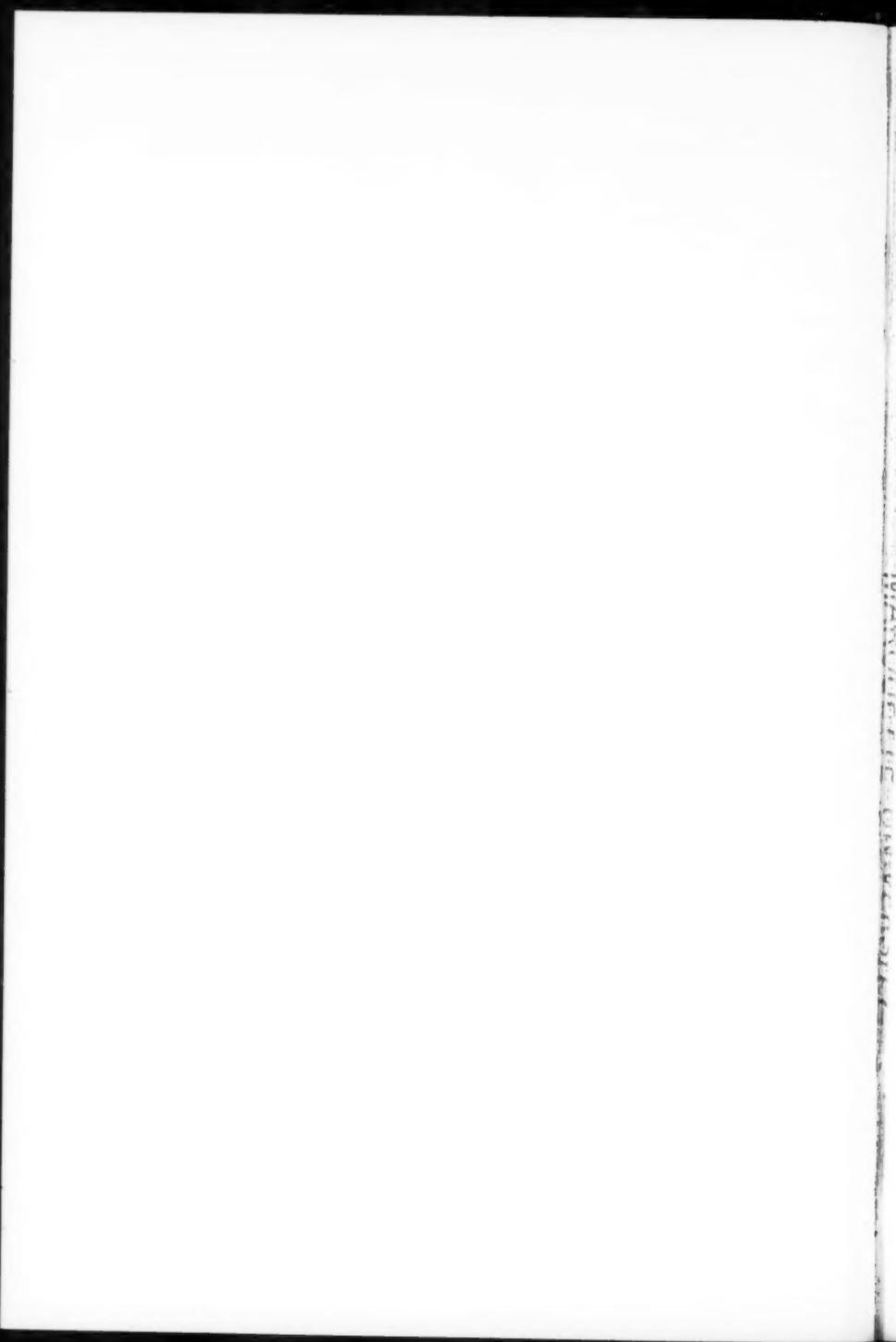
The present book is in effect a searching analysis of the principles and methods of the New Critics and their forerunners. It is, at the same time, the work of one of our New Professors — to keep the same terminology. With the exception of Hulme and Eliot, the group of literary critics whom Krieger discusses are all university professors, and almost all of them are professors of English, trained in linguistic and literary studies, not in philosophy. Now, their assumptions and the problems they treat are basically metaphysical and epistemological, and in such matters most of them are autodidact. It is therefore appropriate that someone, preferably a professor of literature himself, who is competent to do so, should treat them from the vantage-point of philosophy. Mr. Krieger, in spite of his modesty, comes closer than anyone has yet done to filling this bill.

He does a thorough job of criticism, but is limited by his own doubts in the attempt to construct a positive theory of his own.

He points out that the New Critics "had somehow to assert at once the autonomy of art and its unique power to give meaning to our experience," but demonstrates that, generally, they "suffer from a common theoretical deficiency which vitiates their attempt at system-making." Following T. E. Hulme, these critics "desire to justify classicism with the theoretical tools of romanticism," defending the organicism of Coleridge while they attack the romantic theory of imagination. Eliot, according to the author, falls into the same contradiction.

It is impossible in a review, no matter how extended, to outline the steps in Krieger's subtle evaluation of the large number of theorists and critics he discusses, including not only earlier names, but contemporaries as different as Burke, Winters, Ransom, Brooks, Wimsatt, and the Neo-Aristotelians of the University of Chicago. He is especially keen in his demonstration of the error of Brooks and the other contextualists, namely, their cult of complexity and irony for their own sake. "Surely," he remarks, "complexity need not be cherished for itself; nor need we suppose that the more complexity a poem has, the better it is. Indeed to make such a demand, as Brooks seems to, is to set up complexity as a mechanical demand, one that would violate the integrity of the poem as much as would other mechanical demands which Brooks would abhor." *Touché!* Krieger sees that the problem is at bottom one of truth in poetry, but here it seems to me he is at his weakest. He is being pushed towards an Aristotelian position, but he rejects it, partly because he misunderstands Aristotle, partly because he will not face the fact that language is expression of thought and not an autonomous thing.

Krieger defines and examines the four positions historically held concerning truth and poetry: (1) that of Plato and the Puritans, that the poet, with respect to universal truths, is a liar; (2) that of Sidney and the neoclassicists, that poetry gives universal truths, like philosophy, but does it better than philosophy because it gives us the particular example too; (3) that of Castelvetro and later aesthetic hedonists, that poetry is merely recreative; (4) that of Coleridge and the Romantics in general, especially the Germans, that poetry gives only intuitive or imaginative truth, and that this is the highest form of knowledge. Krieger is very



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good here, showing real philosophic and historic grasp. At their best those theories (2 and 4) which seem to give poetry a place as knowledge, he shows, merely make it an ornament for a pre-existing entity: "As Sidney made of poetry the handmaiden of rational philosophy, so the romantics make of it a handmaiden of mysticism. This neglect of language as necessary for the realization of the poet's insights can have regrettable practical consequences, as so much romantic poetry shows us. With so much emphasis on the uninhibited expression of the poet's intuitions and so little emphasis on the controlling disciplines of the linguistic medium, it is inevitable that what we get so often is not poetry at all." (p. 181)

The final chapter of the book ("Some Conditions for an Apology") is the constructive effort of the author, after his critique of existing theories and their historical roots, at a resolution of the problem. Examining here particularly the New Critics' (notably Cleanth Brooks') transformation of Richards' referential-emotive dichotomy by changing the emotive into the contextual, thereby considering it more cognitively, the author points out the chief difficulty that remains: "How can poetry tell us something about our world that we can learn nowhere else when for the contextualist it is not in any obvious sense referential?"

We have seen how great the cost of making poetry referential would be. If it were referential in the sense in which prose discourse is, then obviously what it would tell us about the world we could learn anywhere else. But if it were not referential, how could it tell us anything? If, like Richards, the contextual theorist assigns the referential to science, how, unlike Richards, can he allow poetry to have meaning? (p. 192)

Cleanth Brooks claims that the poet must unify experience. But, as Krieger asks, "in accordance with what principles can a reduction to order take place when the reduction is not to distill our experiential complexity? What principles other than logical and argumentative ones can form this order?" Krieger himself cannot answer this question, although it may seem to answer itself by default. He will not adopt the Aristotelian view of language as the symbol of thought, but neither will he yield to the contextualists' evasion. The book ends like one of those Socratic dialogues in which the air is cleared, but there is nothing to be seen. It is an honest book, and a necessary one. Now it remains for the constructive philosopher to do the job for which the area (or air) has been cleared.

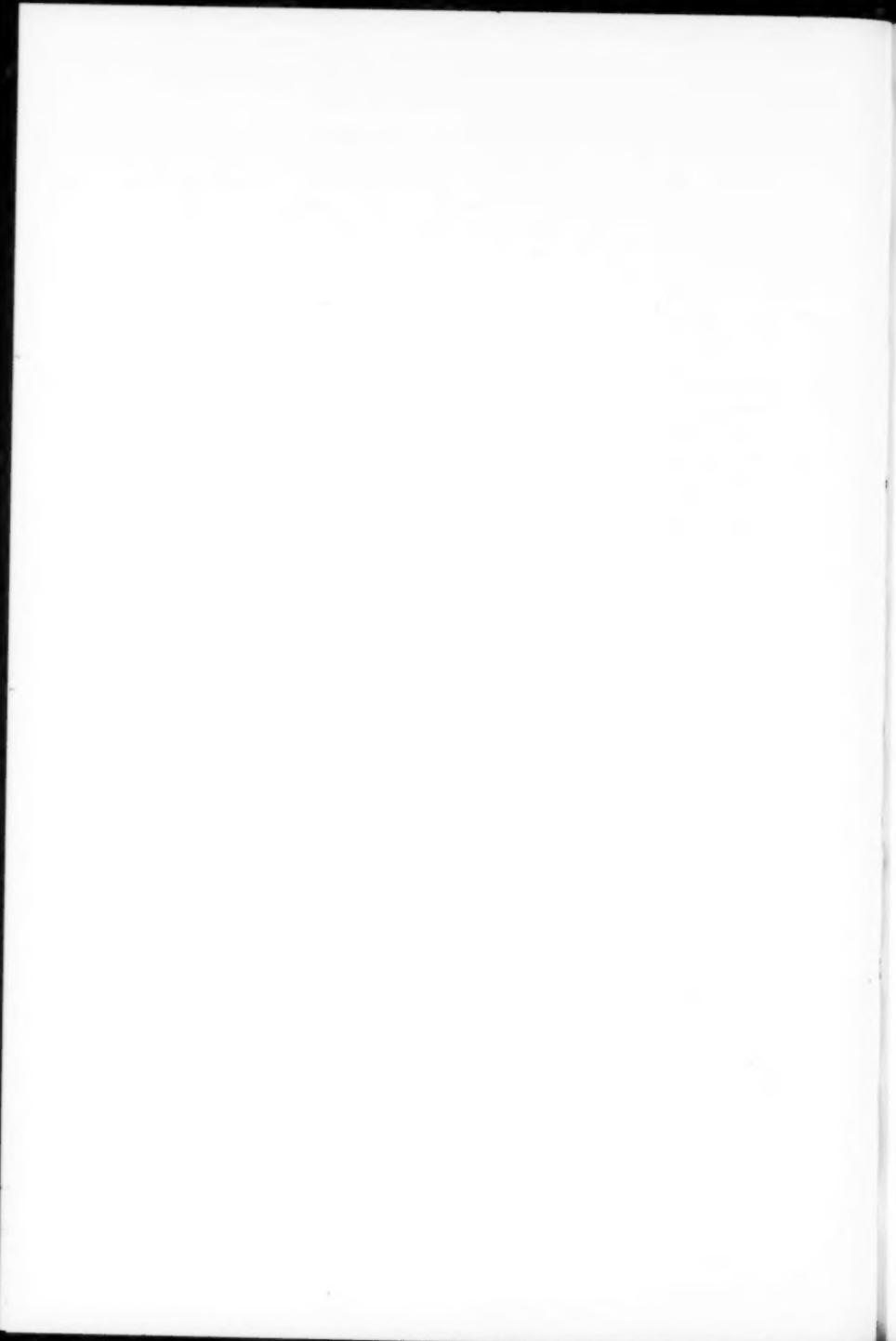
VICTOR M. HAMM

## Capital Fragments

*Esthétique de Max Jacob.* By René Guy Cadou. Paris: Seghers.

IN JULY 1937, René Cadou went to a village by the seashore to recover from the shock of having failed his baccalaureate. He remained there until October, and fell into a friendship with Denis Roy, with whom he happened to talk about Max Jacob. Then Cadou remembered that Michell Manol had advised him to send his verse to Max Jacob for appraisal. So he wrote to Jacob, and received a newsy letter that ended thus: "Everything is a matter of indifference to me except friendship and prayer." And hereby hangs the tale of the present book: a correspondence between Max Jacob and René Cadou ensued.

Cadou thought at first that he should publish the letters *in toto*, by reason



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of the fact that they recapture Jacob's presence so completely. But other considerations intervened, apparently, and a compromise had to be made. The outcome is this volume of fewer than a hundred pages wherein only capital fragments from the letters are presented.

But these fragments are a profusion chosen with an eye to Jacob's utterances on the subject of what might best be termed aesthetics, aesthetics being construed here as a possibility of the poem to be, the difficult poem that Max Jacob painted, wrote, and lived.

This selection of extracts will have to be taken seriously by those wishing to know the range of Max Jacob's convictions. They are a product of intimacy. Cadou says plainly, "I have seen Max work, not in his poems (magic isn't done in daylight), but on his gouaches. I have seen him light a fire that wouldn't catch. I have seen him in prayer. I have seen him roll a few shreds of tobacco on his thumb, I can assure you that nobody was more serious than he in these moments."

Having thus explained the circumstances of the creation of this book, it would only be fitting to report a few of the extracts. But one hardly knows whether to start with "Find your heart and change it into an inkwell" or "There is no success that wasn't a miracle of work at the beginning." And then, "Style is but the strength of what has been carried in length and conceived in strength." Jacob's thoughts evolve and resolve; they possess the essence of their being; he says, "How many thoughts, and what hopes!"

A painter, Jacob urges meditation, energy for definition; a writer, he underlines enrichment in vocabulary, in the manner of an articulate craftsman. Write every day, be it prose, poetry, or whatever is: between, beyond or in a subject; but never in weakness. Bring the simple down, and situate it in a distant space. Surround it with a world. Then transplant it, cautiously.

It is commonplace for a reviewer to observe that he could go on quoting. In the present instance, that is a real temptation; for here are some insights which creative writers must carry above their brows if they wish to be masters of their trade.

Those who see the book will be struck by the portrait of Max Jacob by Picasso, and its coloring.

Spire Pitou

### Brief and Readable

*Coventry Patmore.* By E. J. Oliver. Sheed and Ward. \$4.00.

CHIEF AMONG the characteristics of Patmore as portrayed in this volume are anti-clericalism and independence, the latter defined as "the quality that comes to a man who fully exercises his free will." But one's free will may be used to become the abject subject of another! This is not to cavil over a definition, but to point out that what the author frequently calls Patmore's independence is merely the exercise of free will which, in his instance, never tired of glorying in submission to law, human and divine. Such submission was the very essence of his life as it was of his poetry. A single instance must suffice, taken from a poem the title of which is scarcely compatible with independence -- "Legem Tuam Delexi."

For joy (rejoice ye Few that tasted have!)



## RENASCENCE

Is Love's obedience  
Against the genial laws of natural sense.

The fundamental mystery of Patmore's religious faith that inspired him, at times, to near-eccstasy was divine subjection in the Incarnation.

One of the longest chapters is entitled, "The Anti-Cleric," and earlier in the volume Patmore is described as "an anti-clerical Catholic." Thus the author raises once more the unpleasant question answered in the not-too-distant past, when such a combination was stigmatized as no paradox, but a clear contradiction. Patmore's dislike of some individual priests cannot be denied. One of his closest friends used to tell how, on one occasion, the poet proclaimed with gestures and in a thundering voice that he had serious temptations against faith whenever he heard the sermons of certain priests. This he did to precipitate an argument and to shock a pietistic neo-convert who was present. His dislike of the priests involved in the misunderstanding concerning his memorial church at Hastings was a more serious matter. But it is a far cry from such a state of mind to anti-clericalism—hatred of priests because they are priests—an attitude of which Patmore was never guilty.

Some other statements in the book are highly questionable. To say that Patmore's views on feminism, which he abominated, were "somewhat corrected by Alice Meynell," is likely to lead to the false conclusion that Alice Meynell was a feminist, which she certainly was not, although she was actively interested in woman suffrage—quite a different matter! It is somewhat naive to explain that when Patmore was suggested as poet laureate, and Gladstone remarked, "Patmore died long ago," the Prime Minister merely expressed an unwillingness "to admit that others could share his own legendary powers of survival." For Gladstone, Patmore's "death" occurred years before, when the political ode, "1880-85," was first published, describing the Leader as one whose "leprosy's so perfect that men call him clean!" In other political odes, which in the author's opinion are "simply amusing," Patmore repeated his excoriation of Gladstone, as he did later in "Courage in Politics," a signed article that appeared in the *St. James Gazette*, March 19, 1888. The opinion of Emerson attributed to Patmore—"a sweet and uniformly sunny spirit"—is only half the picture and, indeed, only half of the quotation, which continues: "but the sunshine was that of the long Polar day, which enlightens but does not fructify." In the same essay, Patmore further described Emerson as "a good man—that is one who lived up to his lights—who had little or no conscience. He admired good, but did not love it; he denounced evil, but did not hate it, and did not even maintain that it was hateful, but only held that it was greatly inexpedient." And this is not the worst that Patmore had to say about the Sage of Concord!

The test of intelligent appreciation of Patmore is the understanding and appreciation of the Odes. Here, those selected for detailed comment are the obvious ones commemorative of and inspired by what is seen. Among them is "A Farewell," interpreted as the poet's "final feelings on the loss of the woman he loved." But the loss commemorated in this ode is not the loss by death, but the loss of the union of religious belief which survived death, only to be severed by the poet's act performed, as he describes it in the opening line of the ode: "With all my will, but much against my heart"—submission to the Catholic Church. Few lovers of Patmore will agree that the first half of *The Unknown Eros* "contains Patmore's finest verse"—an opinion explained, it would seem, by the remark-



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that "the later odes are less authentic, less convincing, than the earlier ones." Only when they are uncomprehended can this be said of the wonderful sequence of later odes descriptive of the workings and manifestations of grace as a supplement of nature in effecting the mystical union of the soul with God. A successful poetic treatment of this subject does not require "a depth of mystical experience that Patmore had not then, if ever, acquired," as the author says. In lieu of actual mystical experience, it is sufficient that a poet acquire authentic speculative knowledge of mysticism from the study of genuine mystics. Such knowledge Patmore had in abundance from his study of contemplatives like St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John of the Cross, St. Bernard, and Marie Lataste. This speculative knowledge of real mysticism is the very essence of the odes in Book II of *The Unknown Eros*, culminating in the Psyche Odes.

A brief and readable volume on Patmore has long been needed and this one, despite its limitations, should be gratefully welcomed. It will be treasured for a more sympathetic appreciation of Patmore's second wife than has before appeared, and for such intimate and interesting chapters as "Travel to Rome," happily lacking a repetition of things long known and often said concerning Patmore. Towards the close of the volume, Sargent's portrait of the poet is regrettably described as having caught his "extravagant contradictions of austerity and sensuality." Paradoxes of austerity and sensuousness, surely. But not "contradictions of austerity and sensuality."

Boston College

TERENCE L. CONNOLLY, S.J.

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